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*Flight to* ENGLAND

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*Other Backs by I. A. R. Wylie*

TOWARDS MORNING  
TO THE VANQUISHED  
SILVER VIRGIN  
SOME OTHER BEAUTY  
THE YOUNG IN HEART  
FEATHER IN HER HAT  
PRELUDE TO RICHARD  
FURIOUS YOUNG MAN  
FOREIGN LEGION  
FOUR SONS  
MY LIFE WITH GEORGE  
STRANGERS ARE COMING  
KEEPER OF THE FLAME

# *Flight to* ENGLAND

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I. A. R. WYLIE



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TO  
RACHEL BARRETT  
IN GRATITUDE FOR AN UNFAILING  
FRIENDSHIP



*Flight to* ENGLAND

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## FOREWORD

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*written afterward*

It's only a few weeks since I flew back from England. Yet this morning, re-reading this record of my experiences, I realize that as far as events are concerned, it is already out-of-date. Tobruk is in English hands again. The Eighth Army is on the march—westward. It seems that under the Brass Hats which I derided so bitterly brains were actually at work.

Only war correspondents and radio commentators can keep up with the history of these days. They do a great job, and to the best of them the public owes an as yet unmeasured debt of gratitude for truth told with austerity and dignity. They have fought stupid

censorship. When necessary they have censored themselves. They have done their often heroic best to give listeners and readers an honest picture of their world. It's not their fault that the very rapidity of their means deflects them from their end. Their stories are too hot from the fire. Neither they nor their listeners have time for reflection. One story wipes out another so that no one remembers what happened yesterday or can relate it to what has happened today. One picture superimposes itself on another, so that both pictures are blurred. There is a succession of lightning flashes. But no clear steady light on any scene. "Five hundred German planes over London tonight." But who remembers how many German planes were over the night before and the night before that? Who remembers, in spite of all that was written and spoken at the time, that for two solid months London was bombed from a four o'clock dusk to a late dawn?

A young American soldier, contemplating the ruins back of his London quarters, said to me, "For the love of Mike, why didn't they tell us what it was really like?"

So perhaps this quiet, unspectacular story may have a little value, if only because it is quiet and unspectacular and because it deals less with passing events than with the more constant factors of heart and mind. After all, the fall of Tobruk was not so significant as

the reaction of a British officer who was worrying on that day, not over defeat, but over the complications of ultimate victory.

Here is one other afterthought. I mention somewhere in my diary that the rapid transition from the American to the English moral atmosphere was the most disconcerting of all changes. I did not feel the same change on my return. In the few weeks of my absence, the American temper had risen like a tide to the English level, so that I felt that after three thousand miles of flight I was still in the same world. When Americans stood up for their National Anthem it was a new meaning. They were the prototypes of the English men and women who in silence and immobility expressed the same inflexible purpose.

And finally:

I've always felt that any writer or speaker who sets out to give information and does not first give his main source, which is himself, is a willful deceiver. A Roman Catholic, writing the history of Elizabethan England, who does not say, "I am a Roman Catholic historian," is not playing fair. A Huguenot, describing St. Bartholomew's Eve, who does not mention that he is a Huguenot may be telling the truth. But quite obviously it is not Catherine de Medici's truth. Here, at least, are my cards on the table.

I am, in spite of all temptation, still British. For some

obscure reason having no relation to birth, blood or tradition, I love England as my native land. I love Americans as though they were my people. When I am in America I am always a little homesick for the English countryside. When I am in England I mourn a little for my Americans. But there is a compensation for this spiritual discomfort. For it is better to have faith in some two hundred million people than in only forty million. I have faith in all the English-speaking peoples. I believe that in their unity is our only hope for the survival of our civilization. Of necessity, therefore, I hate and despise appeasers and isolationists alike. I fear them much more than I fear the Germans.

I know the Germans will be defeated.

This is who and what I am. This is my faith—my bias, if you like. And the following simple account of what was, for me, a great journey, is my truth.

*Trevenna Farm,  
Belle Mead, N. J.*

*November, 1942*

*Flight to* ENGLAND

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# 1

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We are leaving the city behind us and driving through a vague, featureless dusk toward scattered lights that flash and disappear like mysterious signals from one world to another. Two of them—red and green beacons—remain fixed. They appear to be offering a last choice. But, in effect, there isn't any—not any more, I suspect, for any of us. As for me I seem to have already lost touch with my well-established life and all too familiar self and to be traveling with an unpredictable stranger through a strange country. It's no use pretending that I am taking the journey casually. True, many travelers have already made it. I shall



have companions who will look, no doubt, as unheroic as I feel. But for all of them and for all the commonplaceness of the event it remains, for people of my generation, a miracle. Now, you can be calm about a miracle. But not casual. What I feel about it, I think, is a sort of serene elation and a great curiosity. The frontiers of my experience are about to be enlarged. As when I come to die I am stripped of all but the one concern—that I shall behave myself under all circumstances and make the most of a culminating adventure.

The taxi driver looks over his shoulder.

"That's the British-Airways over there," he tells me.

"That's where I'm going," I tell him. (For hitherto obsessed by the conviction that everyone must know where I am going I have merely directed him to the air field.)

"Yeah?"

"Ye—yes."

"What for?"

"Flying to England."

His taxi slows up in response to the check in his own mind.

"D'you have to go?"

That's a bit of a poser.

"It looks like it," I say.

Another pause.

"Gee!" he mutters.

He makes no further comment. So, in spite of all appearances, I must be a big shot. Or more likely some sort of female nut who has wangled herself under the official wires. For a while, at any rate, he shares my peculiar destiny. It permits him to drive between armed sentries toward the somber shadow of the airport. There, still wordless, he leaves me to return to the warm familiarity of the bustling streets, and I pass on into a dimly lighted limbo, already peopled with other waiting shades.

Now all the formalities are complete. We chosen few sit silently or talk in undertones with a rather self-conscious nonchalance. Since I know no one, my thoughts wander back to an editor who years ago refused a story because the hero flew the Atlantic—which wasn't possible. This makes me, doesn't it, a Jules Verne, unpublished and unsung? And then there's the taxi driver. How odd it is that an inconspicuous female traveling to England should have struck him dumb! Four years ago, unless she hadn't tipped him according to his deserts, he wouldn't have given her a second thought. Going abroad was normal. It was what females, with nothing much else to do, did—though as time went on less and less easily. Why, I reflect, clasping my bagful

of official tricks to my bosom, when I was young, we didn't even have to have passports.

Provided we had the money, the time and endurance we were free to travel to the ends of the earth. We were, in a forgotten phrase, citizens of our world. We might have wars. But they were arranged and conducted by our Governments and professional armies, and when they were concluded we returned to our old trails and resumed our temporarily interrupted intercourse with people who, though foreigners and not quite in the same class with ourselves, were still our fellow creatures. But this, as has been said, is a people's war, and it is being waged with all the dark, bottomless ferocity and hatred of peoples. So we are walled in not only by physical but by emotional frontiers, and God alone knows when the latter will open again. Meantime, how to get from my New Jersey farm to the nearest town six miles away is becoming a headache—a problem that wouldn't have occurred to my horse-and-buggy predecessor or worried him if it had. To go to England I have had to arm myself with passports, visas, exit-permits, re-entry permits and income-tax receipts—just in case, for one reason or another, I don't come back. The actual crossing will take me only a few hours. But in effect almost a year has passed since I set out. I could telephone to England. But I am not allowed to. My letters from

New Jersey can reach my English friends in a day or so. But they don't. It takes them weeks to arrive. And sometimes they don't arrive at all. In any case they must be empty of all but the most trivial domestic gossip. We travel faster and faster and where we land ourselves, if we're lucky, is in our own back yard. Our voices travel farther and farther. And we hear less and less. For all our lightning methods of communication, the ceaseless flow from our radios, our commentators and correspondents-on-the-spot, we have been virtually struck deaf and dumb. Our nearest neighbors have become distorted rumors.

It's as though we human beings were bewitched by some evil spirit with a nasty sense of humor into short-circuiting ourselves. The bright children of our genius turn into derisive monkeys.

The bell rings its summons, the steel gates open and we eddying, isolated atoms flow together and pass out along a narrow gangway to the monstrous black-winged Charon waiting for us on the dark waters. We take our places and are belted in. Now we rub shoulders. Since the blinds have been drawn, we have nothing to look at but each other's faces, dim and pale in the shaded lights. The monster has awakened. He is bestirring himself, flexing his muscles, muttering under his breath. Suddenly the mutter becomes a

heart-shattering roar. We are moving with him, faster and faster. This, surely, is the moment. But no. He pauses. The roar dies down to a murmur, but this time to a murmur of subdued exultancy. We are swinging round, into the wind, and the pause is ominous, weighted with potentialities. Can it be done? Can this ponderous corporate body of steel and flesh lift itself on what seems to us imponderable nothingness? On the possibility hangs our earthly existence. I find to my satisfaction that this "I" of mine doesn't suffer an extra heartbeat. After all, only the dead are safe. Inasmuch as I am in danger, I am the more alive.

This roar is different. It is deeper, decisive. The monster has come to an irrevocable decision. With the water churning furiously against its flanks it charges forward. Through a chink under the blind I see lights flash past and fall away. We are lifting—rushing up into space. We are not the people we were a minute ago. We have dropped our burdens. We look at each other with the first faint smile of recognition. We have become, in the twinkling of an eye, members of one another.

## 2

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It's nearly three years ago since I left England. Queer how certain memories hang in one's mind like framed pictures. I can see myself standing in Suffolk Street watching the "boots" of the Garland Hotel pile my luggage onto the car. I remember the way he lifted his thin Cockney face to the soft August sky.

"Well, Miss," he said, "it's zero hour for us."

The Garland was such an English hotel. Very English people took refuge in it from so much in London that had become alien to their Englishness. The kind of Americans who love England for the right reasons put up with the mysterious fact that no bathroom

could be found on the same floor with any bedroom and that the only guest telephone was hidden away in the heart of a warren of narrow passages and unforeseeable hidey-holes from which only an old-time rabbit could extricate himself. English people don't like physical comfort. If they did, they're quite smart enough to get it. They want something else, not easily defined, *not* perhaps compatible with comfort, but quite perceptible. The Garland had it. You felt it the moment your shopworn spirit crossed the threshold into its mahogany-shadowed twilight—a well being beyond all reasonable explanation.

I'd gone back to England in June, 1939, to say good-bye to it as my country. Munich had revealed to me that countries had ceased to be merely geographical conceptions. They had become ideas. And it had seemed to me that England as an idea was dead and decaying and that I must seek a new home. I'd found the people feverishly having a good time, trying to hide from themselves that it was a bad one, putting a cynical-realistic face on what they knew in their hearts to have been the worst sort of national disaster—a spiritual disaster. A deeply unhappy people whose very virtues had betrayed them. But I remember that the little Cockney "boots" did not look unhappy or even apprehensive. He looked like a man who has quite simply prepared himself to meet his God.

Driving through the beloved sunlit countryside to Southampton I'd felt a fire kindling under the rubble.

My oldest friend, Rachel, had said good-bye to me. I'd waved to her as my car turned out of the little cul-de-sac into Cockspur Street. Her face was very grave and pale. She was thinking, I know, that she would never see me again.

Well, here I am—on my way back to her. It'll be gorgeous fun telephoning, "Guess who's here, darling!" I peer out of the small windows which the steward assures us can be wrenched out in an emergency so that we can swim for it (For what? we wonder). That's the Atlantic down there. Through a break in the white floor of cloud I can see its darkly gleaming ripple. I find that though I am convinced that one of our port engines is missing I am quite unperturbed. I don't give a damn. I am at peace with myself for the first time in three years.

There are nice people on the plane. Americans of camouflaged importance, two English couples who have been doing Consular duty in forlorn spots on the earth—decent people. You know that though they have made mistakes they've done their darnedest to be decent. Now, after years of unprofitable exile, they are going home to poverty, privation and danger. But there's a serious, shining content about them. The Americans, it seems to me, give off the same light.



They are going into the thick of things—into action. So that for them too this is a sort of homecoming.

So, if that engine is really missing, I couldn't ask for better company.

Someone has just told me that they understand that the Garland has gone. I wonder if the "boots" went with it—whether it was really zero hour for him. I shall soon know about the Garland. But God alone, probably, knows about the "boots."

# 3

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We're on the last lap. We've left Eire behind us. It was being very green and free and perhaps for the first time in its Martyr's Progress a trifle apologetic. It's a glorious June day. But they've pulled down the blinds again so that I shan't, after all, see the cliffs come out of the mists to greet me. However, I'm not to be cheated out of an emotional kick like that. I take an illicit peek. But it's too late. We're over England already and I'm conscious of a sort of physical jolt. What, I wonder, had I expected? I suppose years of black, blaring headlines and dramatic, disembodied voices had developed in my mind the picture of an

armed fortress, a countryside bristling with guns, ravaged by attack and shadowed by defending planes. And the skies are empty of everything but a few fleecy clouds. The fields are as shining and serene as ever. There's a peaceful village down there, tucked in the fold of a hill, the church-tower standing guard, like an old shepherd dog, over a flock of little white houses. Someone says we're over Dorset. Every county in England has a peculiar quality of its own. Dorset has a haunted quality. Nowhere else in England, I think, does the past come so near to quivering into life.

It's a queer thing. I haven't a drop of English blood in me. My mother was an Australian of Scottish descent with a dash of American. My father was a pure Scot. I was born in Australia. I've lived a good part of my life in the States. But no splendid vista of mountain or prairie or desert can move me like this quiet English countryside. But emotion isn't going to get me down or make me see things that aren't there or shut my eyes to things that are. I've got a job to do—to tell the truth, about as much of the truth as I can cram into my small vision. After all, I've got certain qualifications. For one thing I shall see things with fresh eyes. And for another I shall see them as an American sees them. But I shall understand them as an Englishwoman. I'll be irritated like an American by the same

things. But I'll know the reasons for them. If anyone makes a crack at America, I'll be hopping mad. But I'll understand that the crack wasn't meant that way—that it was just one of those sly digs the English are so fond of inflicting on each other—or that it sprang from the ignorance that afflicts both peoples concerning each other. Instead of cracking back I'll do what I can about it. And because I'm still one of them, maybe they'll take my word for it.

But I've got to be honest. Well, in a way I can count on myself for that much. Under sufficient pressure I'd steal as well as the next. But my intellect, such as it is, wouldn't tell a lie, not to save its owner's neck. I've never fooled myself yet, and if you can't fool yourself, fooling other people isn't any fun. If things are bad down there I'm going to say so. All that I can say at the moment is that they look heartbreakingly lovely. Perhaps too lovely. Doesn't Dorset know there's war on? Aren't the grassy flanks of Maiden Castle, garrisoned day and night by Saxon ghosts, bristling with anti-aircraft? I don't know. After all, I'm at least two thousand feet up. It's ridiculous to be afraid.

# 4

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Anyhow, I was wrong about that engine. I step out onto the giant wing of this great, cumbersome miracle-worker, who looks now monstrously complacent. ("I told you I could do it.") A motorboat has slipped over the quiet waters to fetch us off. I take a look at the man who holds out his hand to help me—a neatly uniformed, lean-flanked, pink-cheeked, clear-eyed fellow who smiles at me. "Had a good trip?" he asks softly. I am unreasonably flustered by his tone and his question. What had I expected? People with their jaws thrust out, their eyes somber, their voices harsh, their belts tightened and bristling with instruments of

war? Anyhow, they're not like that. But there *is* something queer about them. It's as though in that night's fantastic transit I'd gone back to the old war. Twenty-four years of dreaming had been wiped out. But in that sleeping interval something had happened. So that though it's the same war the people are not the same. They've changed. I don't yet know what the change is. It isn't material. It's something elusive and disconcerting. It manifests itself in a gentleness—an almost caressing gentleness. (Don't they know there's a war on—that there's an enemy who isn't either gentle or caressing only forty miles away?) The bright-faced girls who serve tea while the luggage is being brought ashore smile at me with an unfeigned kindness. (And they're much neater and, I think, better looking than they used to be.) But what's the matter with them? Are they trying to protect me from some hurt? Do they think I'll break in pieces if I'm roughly spoken to? Even the Customs official who checks up on what now seems an alarming stock of cigarettes, lipsticks and silk stockings seems to be trying to reassure me: "Now, don't worry. It's all right. Everything is going to be all right. . . ."

Behind the custom house a row of small houses have been laid in ruins. (They're my first.) People used to live in those houses. But the people and the

ruins don't add up. They don't, as yet, at any rate, make sense.

We're in a special train—a Pullman, comfortable in the English manner, but shabby. A very old man in a very white coat serves a very simple, tasteless meal. We're getting into London, and I brace myself to meet a much loved friend who has suffered greatly and may be disfigured beyond recognition. I'm not surprised to find that I'm behaving like a moral coward. I always knew I was one. I find that I don't want to look out of the windows. But by chance I catch a glimpse of a house without a roof and of a next-door garden, about four feet square with what I suppose is an Anderson shelter. All around that iron contraption they've planted vegetables and a few bright flowers. So they're still growing flowers. There's the river. But I can't see Big Ben or the Houses of Parliament. Perhaps it's just the angle of approach. Perhaps I'm too flustered to orient myself. Or perhaps they've gone. Perhaps that's one of the things they haven't dared to tell us. We've slid gently to a stop. This is Waterloo Station. It doesn't feel like it. It feels like a Cathedral in which every loud voice or footfall would sound sacrilegious. Evidently we've been entertaining a big shot unawares. Louis Mountbatten is there with all his staff to meet him. The visitor is a

kindly-looking, elderly gentleman. (Perhaps too kindly—too elderly. Perhaps that's what's the matter with our war.) I'd have thought him a small-town business man, if I hadn't known that such don't get on transatlantic planes these days. Anyhow, they all behave as though they were in church. They move softly and talk in undertones. There are no porters. The nice-looking girl who has been sent by the Ministry of Information to take care of me carries my suitcase. I notice how carefully dressed and made up she is. She wouldn't have been so careful in the old days. And I'm not sure she'd have carried my suitcase. Now we're outside the station, waiting, and I know one of the things that's been confusing me. It's this silence. When a city of seven million people goes silent it's something. It's not like country silence. It's not like the silence of the dead. It's a vital, terrific silence. This is Waterloo; eight o'clock double summer time and a lovely evening and not a wheel turns, not a human foot falls. My companion smiles good-humoredly.

"I expect a taxi will come along presently," she says. "It usually does."

I ask her where she lives. Somewhere in the suburbs. Yes, it'll take her an hour or so by tube to get home, after she's deposited me, if she ever does. I feel wretchedly apologetic. I implore her to leave me to my fate. After all, I'm an old traveler—an old Londoner. But



she's quite firm. God help me! I've come from peace, security and plenty—from off the top of the world—and this kid is trying to take care of me. She's so darned anxious that I shouldn't be tired or upset.

"Don't worry," she says softly. "It'll be all right."

But I'm not worrying. *She* ought to be worrying. She ought to be mad—after a long day's work having to fuss with a stranger. But she isn't mad. And she isn't worrying.

A bus like a red-faced monster out of a prehistoric past rumbles into an unimaginable future. The sound of its passing is catastrophic in that amazing hush. At last a taxi that in an hour I've learned to regard as a jewel beyond price, jolts to a standstill. The driver and the taxi are both familiar. Cagey old codgers, both of them. They ought to have tottered into their graves years ago. But they haven't. The driver twinkles bleary, faded eyes.

"Well, I was goin' 'ome," he says. "But 'ere goes. 'Op in, lidy."

I suspect that he and the girl have exchanged glances. She's told him I've made a long journey and that I'm not so young as I was and that I'm tired. So inevitably I'm their cup of tea. I hop in. Now we're on Westminster Bridge. And there, at last, are Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

"Why, they're still there!" I find myself saying.

The girl beside me smiles.

“Oh, yes. They’re still there,” she says.

I make an absurd gesture. I offer her one of the twenty-five-cent lipsticks with which my pockets are stuffed. She looks at me with warm eyes. I’m not sure that there are not tears in them.

“Are you sure,” she asks, “that you can spare it?”

# 5

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They've parked me at Claridge's. It seems fixed in the official mind earnestly intent on learning what goes on over there and what to do and what not to do to keep Americans happy that all new arrivals must stop at Claridge's. En route I remarked to my young protector that when I lived in London I had only once put my neck in that haunt of high-toned luxury and had withdrawn it promptly with a bad financial crick in it. I felt that at once her manner toward me changed. I had ceased to be a bright and shining visitor from another planet. I was down to their earth—on their level. I was, after all, still one of them.

Anyhow, I'm getting out. I don't like the place. Once upon a time—like the Victorian ladies with their bustles and their bosoms—it may have had something. Now that something seems to me at best a disturbing hangover. It's like last year's dance frock—the tulle crushed, the sequins tarnished. It's very English, all right—as my American friends insist. But it's English in the wrong way. It's rather frightening. If this is England—God help us! Things are in awful shape in Libya. Claridge's seems to explain why.

I don't like the burly six-foot doorman. I've no doubt he was a hero in the first phase of the war twenty-five years ago and has a perfect right to the privilege of touching his gold-braided cap to me every time I slink shamefacedly from behind the barricaded front door. But I resent him. I don't like the French headwaiter. He may be a Free Frenchman. But he makes me feel sour and sullen. I don't like the menu. It promises too much, and though I confess the fulfillment doesn't taste of anything particular I am left with a dour sense of disapproval. (My companion assures me good-humoredly that all this seeming opulence doesn't amount to a row of pins in the final scheme of things and that a cautious bureaucracy hasn't thought it wise to crack down on too much too often. But I continue to wag a gloomy head.) Theoretically, you can only be charged at most five shillings for any

meal anywhere. But a caravanserie like this is allowed an additional house charge in accordance with its social status. So I am paying five shillings for my dinner and seven shillings and six pence for the headwaiter, the French menu and my gilt chair. I can almost hear some Cockney commentator, stowing away a hearty unadorned shilling meal at what is known correctly as a British Restaurant, muttering sardonically, "You can 'ave it!"

But I won't 'ave it. I'm getting out. For one thing, I've a notion that my being here will do me no good with my old friends who were always simple folk living ordinary, middle-class English lives and who no doubt are now definitely shabby and down to bed-rock. I've an abiding hope that I'll be out of step with the real England. But at the moment I am definitely depressed.

Among other things I don't like my fellow guests. I find myself glowering at them as they sit discreetly murmuring at a well-spread table. (Don't they know that the British Army in Libya is in full retreat?) The women dressed with elaborate simplicity, look as though they were suffering from a repressed case of diamonds and ermine and would break out in a gorgeous rash at the first safe opportunity. The men are sleek, pink and terribly well scrubbed. My soul mutters, "*À la Lanterne!*" But I am probably very unjust.

The women, no doubt, have been slaving all day at their war work. Some of the officers have Military Cross ribbons on their broad, immaculate bosoms, and the British don't toss their military honors to all and sundry. I'm sure that like their fathers they will die heroically in some stupendously mismanaged battle. The best of these people will doubtless do their duty as they've been seeing it for the last hundred years. But they haven't moved and what they see hasn't changed. It informs them that they are the traditional leaders of the country. Well, in my not too prolonged lifetime they have led the country in three wars through a series of disasters that have only been offset by a final victory by the stubborn guts of the people who followed them. That, I should think, is enough. Perhaps they think so too. I've an idea they don't believe much in themselves either. They've a façade behind which lurks a natural desire for survival but no real conviction as to its rightness or inevitability. They represent what was once a dynamic order, often ruthless and predatory but not without vision. It has been static for years. It is now dead from the neck up and presently, all being well, it will be dead from the neck down too. I am fair enough to realize that I am generalizing rather recklessly. The best of the Order have made the full circle. They've risen from nothing and touched the zenith of human power and glory and

stayed there long enough not to give a damn. They're ready, like Churchill, to slide back into nothing and roll up their sleeves and start again.

The worst of them—the most dangerous and the most ineffectual—are the faded blossoms of that bouquet of post-Armistice orchids—the Bright Young Things. They sip cocktails at stated hours and know all the dirt about everything. And it is very, very dirty. They know the real reason why Churchill went to America and they assure you that if you knew your hair would turn gray. I know them because I've met their American prototypes. They disembowel delicately every hope and every ideal you ever cherished. They leave you feeling like a village lout to have ever believed in anything.

Anyhow, my bedroom has a telephone. I've just got Rachel on the wire with most un-English celerity. It was swell to hear her warm though rather shaken voice. "Oh, darling, how wonderful!" We begin to plan for her coming up from her Essex village. It isn't going to be so easy. She has a car but of course no gasoline, and the only taxi lives in the next village. It's a 1935 Ford and works—literally—only by fits and starts. But she'll cope somehow. (I've met that word several times already.)

"But where *are* you?" she asks of necessity.

"Claridge's . . ."

An aghast pause.

“My God!”

“Oh, but I’m getting out,” I explain humbly.

Her voice has become a little grim.

“You’d better.”

So I am.



# 6

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I'm standing at the bottom of Suffolk Street. There's the Garland Hotel—just the façade. Behind it is nothing—not even rubble. (They've done a swell job of cleaning up.) Well, I've made up my mind not to be emotional about this sort of thing. I've known all about it for the last two years. It's not news to me and I've been told firmly not to write about it. It's old stuff—and yet isn't. When you see it with your own eyes it's new. It's like a sudden cruel kick where it hurts.

I swallow resolutely, put the “boots” firmly out of my mind and make my way across the Haymarket.

I notice that Beatrice Lillie is in a show at His Majesty's. Her only son was killed a couple of months ago. Well, what of it? That's not news either these days.

The railings round the green, tree-shaded heart of St. James Square have gone and the grass is escaping like a released spring of green water from that old countryside that lies under the stones and bricks of the city. There are actually wild flowers growing out of a torn patch of earth. How grave and noble St. James Street looks in this long twilight! There's a little eddy of American soldiers outside an office building which they have taken over. They aren't like the Americans of the last war. They look grave too, as though something (that wasn't news) had subdued and even shocked them. Except for them the street is empty. I go down the cul-de-sac of Duke Street hoping to find my old club and perhaps rooms for myself and Rachel, who is wangling her way up to town by slow stages and hopes to arrive tomorrow. But Duke Street isn't a cul-de-sac. The end of it has been blasted open and there are now tall stately trees where there had been stately houses. At their feet are naked foundations. It is like Pompeii. The ruins have already an air of peace that comes to the scene of an ancient catastrophe. It is beautiful. But my Club has gone.

Next to the empty place where it once stood I find a quiet little hotel, quite intact. The lady who runs it and who reminds me of an alert and friendly fox terrier admits that they were nearly blown up too. "But not quite," she adds, smiling brightly. Which of course makes all the difference. So why worry? She gives me two pleasant, simple rooms overlooking the gashed and fire-blackened walls. "You can see the trees now," she points out to me. So everything has its bright side. "We can only give you breakfast," she goes on. "We had to close the restaurant. But of course we shall open it again when things get better." So they *are* going to get better.

The manageress tells me that G. B. Stern comes here and is expected soon. I shall be very glad to see Peter who was, I know, with so much else of a like nature, bombed out of the Albany. Somehow I can't imagine it. It must have been a big, big bomb. I wonder what it did to her.

Rachel and I are going to share a bathroom which was obviously never intended to be a bathroom with some other as yet unencountered guest on the same floor. I draw a deep sigh of well-being. This is England. I'm really home at last.

All the same this first day has worried and disturbed me. I can't orient myself. I can find my way, geo-

graphically speaking. But in the minds of the people I am lost. And all the signposts are gone. I suppose this is partly due to that telescoping of time and space. One day I was in America and the next in England. The change is too sudden. It's not just the appearance or disappearance of things—this is a different spiritual climate. I'm not dressed for it, and I go about feeling conspicuous and ill-informed—like a woman wearing a straw hat in November. I feel I ought to explain and apologize. "You see, it's the only one I've got. And they're still wearing straw hats in America." That's one way of putting it. Or more seriously, I feel like an ordinary earthy mortal who finds herself among a people who have been dead and are alive again. The merest child is wiser than I am. I'm an outsider to a great experience, and there's nothing I can do about it except to walk softly. It would help, of course, if I wasn't materially so well-dressed. (This lament should excite a ribald reaction from friends who know my peculiar capacity for looking as though I'd been pulled through a bush backward.) It's not as though these people looked badly. On the contrary they look better. The women especially, even the expensive ones, used to be rather untidy and to run to bits of this and bits of that. Now they've stripped down to the essentials, and they're almost painfully neat and careful. Each stocking, every silk remnant from a dim

past, every well-preserved garment is treated with reverence and worn with an air. The result is a new kind of smartness. Everyone has a good figure and a good carriage. To slouch would be to admit weariness. To be weary now with so far to go would be to admit defeat. You can't get fat and only those with glandular trouble or an unnatural passion for potatoes can stay fat. Skins and eyes are clear. But the middle-aged have become old. And the old people are the kind that have to be felled with a meat-axe. These people are survivors. They're fit.

This morning, on my way to pick up my emergency ration book (which I hope will make me popular when I land for a week-end on my friends) and my gas-mask, I ran into what we used to know as a smart woman. She was a nasty shock—an offense. I wondered why someone didn't throw rotten eggs or string her up on a lamp-post. But of course there aren't any eggs, rotten or otherwise. And anyhow these people wouldn't throw them and they wouldn't string up even a German. As far as I can make out they're not angry—not about anything or with anybody. They don't seem able to hate properly. I believe that's what's worrying me—this calm, this quiet, this order, this terrible good-nature. Can a people so lacking in violence survive against a people who are violence itself?

I'm frightened as I was when I looked down and saw those shining English fields.

Perhaps if things had changed more it would be easier to keep one's foothold. But so much is just where it was that when suddenly it isn't you feel as though you'd been walking along a familiar street and had been tripped up by a booby-trap. Bond Street, for instance. Why, there's Asprey's and there's Finne-gan's. At first sight they are as bright and alluring as ever. But then you stop and look and you recognize the things you yearned over three years ago. Only the price tags have changed. (Everything that you need to exist is rationed, and the things you don't need you can't afford.) And then a few steps farther along and there's a hideous gash and something that looks like a huge doll's house whose front has been left open and the dolls and the furniture scattered by some bad-tempered child. (High up, on the third floor, is a beautiful Chippendale mirror, not even cracked.) Beyond that again, where once stood a famous jeweler's, is a reservoir of water. It's so deep they've hung up a life-belt and a warning—presumably to little boys—to please keep out. But a couple of ducks, transients, no doubt, from Regent's Park, have flouted the authorities. The water on which they navigate contentedly awaits the next onslaught.

Anyhow, I've got my gas mask and it promises to be a major affliction. The attendant insisted on a fitting and stood back to consider the results.

"You look as though you thought it an improvement," I muttered from my murky confines. He gave me a sly little Cockney grin.

"Well, Miss, I wouldn't go as far as that."

Rachel has come. We hold each other close and in silence. I wouldn't have her see how shocked I am. After all, she's in her late sixties, and I remember how sick she was through that last bitter winter. Her heart gave out. And of course with seven million women either with the Armed Forces or in industry you can't hope to get a servant or help of any kind and the rations for a single person living without benefit of canteens or restaurants are grim. (Twenty-five cents worth of meat a week. Two ounces of butter, four ounces of bacon, three ounces of cheese, two ounces of tea—that hurts—no fruit, and twenty-four points for whatever they will get you in dried food, etc. And you can come and get it on your own two feet. Which in Rachel's case means a mile's walk to the village store, weather and strength permitting.)

Well, thank God, I can give her a little comfort for a little while. And I'm glad, after all, for those shamefully good clothes that I can leave behind me.

This is a strange city. At six o'clock the flow of life begins to ebb. By nine o'clock the last theatre has closed. The last taxi has vanished. Only around Piccadilly and Leicester Square a small pool of soldiers and sailors and women in uniform swirls slowly about the tube entrances before it seeps underground. By eleven o'clock the last bus has rumbled home. But it is still broad daylight. Rachel and I walk enchanted through these wide, empty streets whose beauty and gray dignity stand revealed to us for the first time. No matter what vandalism has been perpetrated on her not only by her enemies but by her own people (and Berkeley Square makes you feel that the English deserved a bomb or two dropped on the right places) the grandeur of this city still rises superbly out of the past. Now you can see it. The gaudy rags and tatters of mad advertisement and spendthrift excess have been stripped from those august shoulders. I know now why I loved this city above all cities in the world. Her bones are good.



# 7

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When one of our raids is reported the report reads something like this: "Five of our planes failed to return." It never says "five pilots failed to return." One wonders why. In the last war we took a hundred thousand killed and wounded in our stride. Is it that we can't take this sharply individualized loss? (One almost hears these young men talking to each other. "Boys, I guess we're for it.") Or is it that the planes really seem to us more important? If so it doesn't make sense. In time and cold cash it takes more to build a good fighting man than a good fighter plane.

I fancy two influences have produced this odd

psychological phenomena—our horror of being caught at the shrine of the Great God Blah-Blah and our passionate faith in the new God Production. In America, at any rate, people think, dream and talk Production. They seem to be sure that if only they can build the right number of tanks and planes the Germans will automatically fall flat on their faces. One of the last admonitions delivered to me before I set out was, “Don’t, for heaven’s sake, don’t tell us how they can take it and dish it out. We know all that. Tell us what they are turning out.” This seems to me to be putting the cart before the horse. For one thing, we can’t be sure of “all that.” People’s states of mind change. And what they may be “turning out” today may not mean a thing tomorrow. The French didn’t lay down their arms in 1940 because they hadn’t any and the British didn’t hold out because they had. Perhaps it’s because I’m an incurable romantic that I insist doggedly that a good gun isn’t of the slightest use without a good man behind it—also that a good man isn’t an invariable factor.

Over here, perhaps because they know this, they don’t talk so much about production—or, for that matter about anything—and London is not the place, I fancy, to find out what, if anything, is going on in the minds of the producers and the men and women who will eventually handle their products. As to what

is being produced, officialdom is always ready to dole out stale statistics, and I'm certainly not going to be told more than the next. (And if by sleuthing I could find out more I wouldn't tell.) Anyhow, statistics have always filled me with a dour distrust. I am one of those simple-minded mathematicians who, when they add up two and two, get four. Which is what the expert rarely does. Colonel Lindbergh, for instance, travels all over Europe and gets an expert's eyeful of what is going on there and comes back to tell a hero-hypnotized country that the Russians are no good, the British are no good and that the Germans are the heaven-appointed masters of the air. And within a few months the British have shot the Luftwaffe out of English skies (2,375 German planes downed in three months as against a third of that number lost—that's what I call vital statistics) and in another few months homemade British bombers are knocking the day-lights out of the invulnerable German cities. Certainly the British were outnumbered, four to one. But their machines happened to be four times better and their pilots four times better-trained with a yard or two of extra guts thrown in. But Colonel Lindbergh obsessed, one presumes, by numbers, hadn't recognized such an imponderable detail as quality. (After which egregious display one would have thought this elderly

adolescent would have kept quiet. But an American public man can always reckon on the American public memory which never sustains more than a nine days' wonder. If he can hold his horses for nine days he can start driving them all over the lot again and no one will hold his previous exploit in breaking speed laws and running down innocent citizenry against him.)

Well, now I'm prepared to put my neck out too. If I can find out positively what the British people over here are thinking and feeling I'll prophesy approximately the date of the Armistice. At any rate, I'll be much surer than I am at the moment who will dictate the terms. For let's not let our national vanities obscure our vision. The United States, given time, will have the final word. But for today and tomorrow Great Britain is the thread on which the fate of Europe hangs—whether it is still of steel or not is the predominant question. If it had broken in 1940, Europe would have been Hitler's without hope, if not for a thousand years at least for too long. If it breaks in 1943 it is hard to believe that Russia, bereft of supplies convoyed by the British Navy, could at best do more than hold what is left to her. The United States even after liquidating Japan would have no jumping-off point. At best she could only keep her hemisphere intact and wait for Hitlerism to crumble

under its own monstrosity. At worst she might succumb to the poison seeping across her frontiers. (And every country has its germ-carriers.)

So I don't think I'm indulging in blah-blah if I lay stress on psychological factors rather than on factories. It seems to me that what goes on in this people's mind will be more decisive than military setbacks and what doesn't go on in the wooden heads of generals. It's the key to the future. I want to find it and I mean to look for it everywhere where I'm allowed to stick my nose. I won't despise a day-nursery. But so far I haven't found it here in London—at least, I hope I haven't. I guess Claridge's and the Ivy Restaurant and such like haunts of too much ease of living have got me dithering a little. The crowded "shows" have made me uneasy and depressed. They shouldn't distract an imbecile—much less a people with the enemy literally overhead. (Last night I heard the sinister throb of his plane and a burst of gun-fire.)

So I'm getting out of London too. And I'm still hoping.

If Claridge's and such give me a pain in the neck Paddington Station at ten o'clock in the morning gives me a kick. It's shabby and tough and on the job. Crowds of men and women in uniform flow purposefully on their way under the direction of a clear

woman's voice speaking through an amplifier. In the restaurant the same old buns, a little staler and without benefit of currants, lurk under the same glass sepulchres. But there are no porters. You carry what you can and what you can't you leave behind. Although I'm an hour ahead of train-time I realize that I'm lucky to be able to squeeze myself and my bag into a corridor where, metaphorically, I come to rest between two lean, hard-looking infantrymen in battle-dress and with all their equipment. It's no use pretending that the well-known English reserve has been melted by adversity into an outflowing brotherliness. It hasn't. There's no soulful chit-chat. Nobody is telling anybody the story of his or her life. No gallant gentleman has as yet offered me his seat. (This is a total war and the women are totally in it.) We're packed like sardines. But at least we're all sardines together in the same tin and the same stickiness, and, in spite of the rifle butt which has just landed accidentally on my left foot, I feel better.

If there are any first-class compartments on this train they have been taken over, I think, finally by the honest-to-God third-class. Of course there's no restaurant. I share out my ham sandwiches wangled for me by my fox-terrier landlady, with the soldiery. Even then, though they grin their thanks, we don't get matey. We're just—how shall I put it?—quietly

sure of each other. The atmosphere, even with all the windows open, is heavy with boot-leather, tobacco smoke and humanity. It smells good to me. Nobody grumbles, nobody tries to scrounge what isn't coming to him by rights. In the corner of the compartment back of me a gunner corporal and a corporal in the A.T.S. are squeezed together. They're not young. They're sober, middle-aged and, I should judge by their quiet acceptance of each other, married. They look as though they'd been through a lot and were very tired. Presently she takes off her military cap and he puts his arm around her and she rests her head on his shoulder. And then he takes off his cap and rests his head on her curls. (All Englishwomen in uniform have curls—all sorts and conditions of curls. It's a last pathetic clinging to femininity, and there's nothing a no doubt outraged War Office dare do about it.) Presently both corporals are asleep. And no one even smiles.

I've landed in a Midlands industrial town. It's not entirely industrial. Once upon a time it was a village and then it became a quiet market town and now, seething and bustling, it still carries the marks of its pleasant friendly past. "The Flying Horse" where I am staying dates back to the Middle Ages. Like my lost Garland it is a maze of narrow passages that wan-

der up and down and round about and small oak-beamed rooms lurking in odd corners. The running H. & C. in the bedrooms seems a rather scornful anachronism.

I was met by the Regional Commissioner. In spite of the fact that I'm his day's headache he doesn't seem to resent me. I'm not just a tiresome female taking up his time. This is my war, too, and I've got a right to know and see all he's got to show and tell. In fact I fancy that he hasn't specialized me as a woman. I'm another worker on a particular job and doing it to the best of my ability. He takes it for granted that I know what I'm doing and that I've got the guts to do it. He's learned that from the other women. It's so much part of his makeup that he doesn't think about it.

He's a huge, tough, weather-beaten, scarred-looking man with hot brown eyes and fists like hams. He slams his shabby rattle-trap car about as though it were a tank mowing down Jerries. He's a Lancashire man. Eh, by goom, and he's got no use for those gormless Londoners. He's a czar here and he cuts through all their red tape like that. He throws out his fist in a gesture that is not one of cutting down but of laying flat.

"We're total war down here," he says, "and no nonsense."

So now I'm beginning to hear it—the throb of the



dynamo, the thunder of action, of resolute purpose for which my anxious ears have been waiting. It's like a tremendous music, coming nearer.

There are twelve regional commissioners in England, and in their regions their word goes. My friend boasts that not a factory under his jurisdiction, even during the most savage bombing, was thrown out of its stride for more than a few hours. Every factory has its waiting shadow. He can throw a less essential industry out on its ear to make room for the more essential.

"I'll show you," he says.

We drive out of town. The factory he wants to show me makes bomb fuses. It's not a big factory and it's not exceptional. It's typical. "When you've seen it you'll know what's going on all over my region. You can tell the folks over there not to worry."

He's not worrying. He's set up and confident.

We're met by the owner of the factory which used to make buttons. I gathered that he isn't sure whether he owned it any more or not. Anyhow, he runs it. He's a little fellow with snappy eyes and a cherubic smile. He's sick at heart at what those idiots are doing in Whitehall. But as to what is going on in his factory, well, I'd see for myself.

Nine-tenths of the workers are women and a num-

ber of fourteen-year-old children. The manager might be the father of the lot—he's that tickled with them.

"The kids ought to be playing, of course," he says. "It makes me sick to see them here—forty-eight hours a week. That used to be a man's work. But that's what they want to do. As to the women . . ." He becomes unaffectedly emotional about them. He says, "They're winning this war." And the commissioner nods solemn agreement. That's a fact. It's not like the last war when women doing their bit were still rather a joke. They're in this up to the neck. It's not just that they're faithful and expert, or that they've shown a staggering physical courage. They've shown a physical endurance which leaves the average man at the post. Some of them have been working sixty hours a week. Their homes may be as much as twenty miles away, and they have to go by bus or train. Or if it's not too far they bicycle. When they reach home they have to get dinner. They're up at six in the morning and get breakfast. Some of them are married and have children who have to be parked with neighbors or at day-nurseries. There are the rations to cope with. . . . Well, they cope somehow. (I'm beginning to get the significance of this new use of the word.) However, the sixty-hour week is on its way out. It was too tough even for the toughest of them. They were beginning

to crack. Fifty-two hours is about right for health and efficiency.

"Seven million of 'em," the manager says, wide-eyed.

I try to talk to some of them. But I feel shy and rather ashamed. The women sit at long work benches and their job is brought to them on a moving belt. Their hands flash like the hands of a pianist performing an intricate piece. (It takes two weeks to make them expert.) They glance up at me when I ask questions, but their hands don't stop and I know, though they smile at me, that they are a little impatient with the interruption.

"Let's get on. Let's beat last week's record. Let's get on with the bloody war."

"A lot of them have men at the front," the Commissioner remarks. "They won't let them down."

The factory is light and airy. It has an excellent canteen where they can get a square meal at specified times of the day and night—a heaping plate of meat and vegetables and potatoes, a dessert of some sort and a cup of tea or coffee for a shilling and without ration cards. That helps. The canteens explain why, on the whole, the working men and women though often tired and thin-looking seem healthier than they were three years ago. They're eating better than they did when they were left to their own devices which con-

sisted usually of bread and marge, and stewed tea and fish and chips.

The factory has a first-class surgery and dentist's office, fully equipped. The workers can get their medical attention on the spot. The manager seems to know them all by name and their histories.

"We're a family," he says. "Their interests and the managements are the same and they know it. They can come to me and talk when things go wrong or when they think they could be done better."

Well, anyone can fool me on statistics but not on atmospheres and states of mind. This atmosphere feels lively, friendly and contented. The owner isn't getting any profits. The chances are he'll be flat broke and without a business when the war is over. The workers are taxed, too, to the limit and what they have left won't buy them anything more than he gets. They're all in it together. So let's go.

An odd little coincidence. One of the women who is wearing dark glasses takes them off for a minute and we stare at each other. She's not like the others. She's not a country woman or a provincial. She's petite and fine-drawn with a woman-of-the-world air about her. Suddenly I remember a smart little dress shop off Knightsbridge. She owned it. She used to sell me my evening dresses. She laughs. "Of course! It's Miss Wylie, isn't it?"

It seems she's been through a London training school and has been "directed" here.

Her shop has gone. Her clients have gone and all her savings. So why worry?

I'm beginning to get the idea. If you've given up everything personal then there isn't anything to worry about. You can relax. You can fix your mind on the one common purpose. "Let's get on with this bloody war."

The commissioner parks me at my inn. Tomorrow we'll do some more factories. He isn't going to let me off one of them. Now he's off on a fifty-mile drive to tackle a last night's "incident." He looks as fresh and fierce as ever.

I retire, bedraggled and footsore, to bed. But I feel much better. I'm beginning to feel swell.

I must have fallen asleep. Suddenly I start to full wakefulness and then lie still, with my heart thumping. I've heard that sound often enough. I heard it in America in that otherwise rather phony piece, *The Wooky* and in *Mrs. Miniver* which I saw just before I left. But this is different. This is the reality. This is danger—not just drama. I get up and slip on a dressing-gown and peer out into the lighted corridor. An elderly "boots" in shirtsleeves is coming down it and thumping at the doors. "Siren's gone, sir . . ." just as

though he were announcing breakfast. He adds a post-script. "They're dropping things."

They certainly are. The near-by thuds seem to hit me somewhere about my solar-plexus. I don't like it—and yet I feel good too. I stand about uncertainly—not knowing the etiquette. No one stirs. A neighbor whose snores have been temporarily interrupted begins to snore again. I close the door. After those sinister blows and the flash of fire over the roofs of the near-by houses the silence of the town seems to become absolute. It's as though every living thing held its breath. The stones and the bricks wait.

I'm thinking of that factory. It's a target. I wonder if the women have gone underground or whether they're carrying on till the final signal comes over. I suppose they're frightened. Anyone who says he's not frightened is either a liar or a fool. I'm neither. But I'm not frightened of anything I can put a name to. I've had a good life. If I go this way it'll be probably much pleasanter than sneaking out through old age or some mean disease. No—it's a sort of spontaneous reaction of my body in defiance of my reason. It's not wholly unpleasant. At the back of my mind is the thought, "Now I belong a little. Now I'm not quite an outsider. . . ."

Suddenly in the narrow, ancient passageway beneath my window I hear the measured, unperturbed

tread of an air-warden. He's whistling to himself. It's the best music I've heard since the "All Clear" of the last war. So in medieval times the night-watchman must have passed down that passageway:

"Midnight. And all's well . . ."

At breakfast the "incident" is not even mentioned, and I don't like to ask about it. It might look fussy. And what is there to fuss about?

## 8

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Somebody at lunch today hazarded the suggestion that the German aviators had tried deliberately *not* to hit York Cathedral. But the consensus of opinion seemed to be that the speaker was an optimist.

Anyhow, I don't think it's an official secret that the Cathedral, so far, is intact. I'm resting in its twilight, apparently alone, and the whirlpool of facts and figures begins to subside in my tired mind. By keeping very still I seem to have become part of a great continuity, rising out of the past and flowing darkly, steadily between these slender pillars cut into the future.



York, I think, is the noblest of our Cathedrals. It is almost as pure and perfect as Salisbury but without the latter's coldness. It is more severe than Canterbury which is fiery and turbulent with history. I suppose I'm an incurable romantic and what I feel has no realistic value whatever. But though things seem to be going from bad to worse in Libya I am not afraid. What with the Regional Commissioner, more and more factories and York Cathedral, I don't believe the Germans are going to win this war. I'm getting Claridges and its ilk out of my nervous system. My first guide was right. Nothing of all that is important—only an annoying hangover.

Factories. Figures. Production. More this week than last week. Three times as much as last year. As many airplanes as the Germans can turn out. Better airplanes. And next week more. Employers who have surrendered profits. Workers who have surrendered rights won with blood and sweat and tears—who let themselves be shunted round to whatever job needs them and chained down to it.

All this and York Cathedral too. . . .

Some of the men in command say queer, unexpected things. One of them said to me, "A few of us are taking advantage of the workers. They're using their determination to win the war to put over old abuses." He spoke sternly, resentfully. He wanted me to know

that neither he nor the majority of his kind had any part in what was not only a betrayal of the workers' and of the country's industry but of the industrialists themselves.

Well, I continue to be inexpert. I don't basically know one factory from another. But I'm beginning to collect the broken lights and put them together. The workers may have a one-track purpose—"Let's get on with the bloody war"—but they know what they're paying for it. They're paying with their liberties. But when the time comes they mean to be paid back. And then some. That is what one might expect. What one wouldn't expect is that the employers are ready to pay them. They're a little more than willing. They're sick, too, of a decaying system. The nineteenth century was dead forty-two years ago. Let's shake off its skeleton grasp on us. Let's start something the nineteenth century didn't dream of. England is a shambles. Let's build from the foundations. They're good foundations. They'll carry a new idea. I may be expressing the "bosses" after my own manner rather than theirs, which would be coldly matter of fact. But I believe that to be their temper.

One of the chief executives of Rowntree's said something to me that was also rather startling. He said, "You know—Englishmen are incorruptible." I wouldn't dare quote this statement if he hadn't been a

hard-bitten Australian, and Australians by and large aren't given to flattering Englishmen. Obviously it was a generalization. But an important one. It meant that if, when it came to principles, Englishmen couldn't be bought and sold, they could, whatever their differences of opinion, trust each other. That is very important now. It will be more important when the war is over.

Seebohm Rowntree, a senior member of that honorable and powerful family came over to my hotel to talk to me. He's an old man, in government work up to the neck. But he's thinking of the future as a young man, mellowed by experience, enriched by a long life of thought and study, might think of it.

I've seen Rowntrees. It's a model factory. Everything that can be done within the capitalist system to deal fairly and generously with the worker has been done. But it's not enough. Paternalism isn't the answer. No one, so far, has found the answer. But Mr. Rowntree thought it would be found, because they were all looking for it.

"People talk of the future revolution," he said. "But we've been having our revolution for the last twenty years. The war is merely an acceleration. Call it evolution, if you like. Whatever it is, it has prepared us to accept the consequences without bitterness or bloodshed."

"The Communists are going to be disappointed," I said.

He intimated that in his opinion all extremists were going to be disappointed. Englishmen didn't like extremes. They liked compromise and illogical solutions, which, because they were illogical, were human and therefore workable. But there was one knot in the problem that had to be untied—how to reconcile security with freedom. They were all breaking their fingernails over it. It's easy enough for a government or an employer to ensure a man a job—but only on condition that he agree to any job, anywhere. And that is, in effect, a glorified slavery. However, the great thing was that the employers wanted a solution and were ready for it, even if it involved the surrender of their most fiercely guarded positions. Mr. Rowntree suggested, as a case in point, that I should read Samuel Courtould's pamphlet, "Government and Industry." I've got it with me now. I'm marking some of what I feel are the salient passages:

Industrialists are invaded today by a growing sense of the inevitability of change, which they accept without bitterness. There's a truer patriotic feeling, arising from a conscious respect for British ideals and the progressive gains of the past in which all classes have had a hand. . . . *A reawakening of conscience: they*

*(the industrialists) ask themselves what they have done to earn past privileges and what they are doing in return for them to-day. An industrial career is now a métier and not merely a road to private acquisition.*

Government control has come to stay.

It is fairly safe to make the generalization that the more educated an employer is the more he sympathizes with the claims of Labor and the more easily he overlooks excesses due chiefly to ignorance. . . . They (the industrialists) must learn history, humanities, perhaps the classics. For them the learning of industrial "technique" is of secondary importance: in their case, if anywhere, the achievement of the ultimate function of education—to impart character and to teach the understanding of men—is the supreme necessity.

I believe that the trading and bargaining instinct is quite highly enough developed in our civilization and that an artificial fostering of it is not only immoral but economically unsound in the long run. Extravagant advertising and high-pressure salesmanship are directed to selling things to people who do not really want them. (I believe this to be a more insidious evil than street-corner betting.) It would be better to teach the public to resist the blandishments of salesmen and advertisers.

My own belief is that the total elimination of the speculator from the industrial field would do measure-

less good and very little harm. As regards the gambling in stocks and shares in existing companies I cannot see that this benefits industry in any way whatever. It has no more merit of any kind than gambling over games and it has many very serious consequences. . . .

York Cathedral doesn't seem to me an inappropriate place in which to extract these quotations from one of the world's greatest industrialists. Some of the phrases Courtould uses seem to me to have a flavor not alien to this atmosphere. Mr. Courtould won't be offended, I hope, if I mention that Saul, on the road to Damascus, has just flashed into my mind.

If Mr. Courtould and Mr. Rowntree are symptomatic, as I think they are, then it is clear that the natural cleavage between the industrialist per se and the capitalist per se is widening. The industrialist is beginning to re-realize himself, not primarily as a money-maker but as an artist, a creator who is, however, answerable to the people. Consequently he resents more and more definitely the middleman and the speculator who, for purely financial ends, distort the character of his creation. The results of this change of mind and heart may be very far-reaching. It would not surprise me if in my lifetime the Stock Exchange, in its present form, were reformed out of recognition. At least gambling in stocks may well become illegal.

If industry and agriculture both come to this new estimation of their significance to themselves and to the country, it is possible that the conflict between free enterprise and government control may be thereby automatically resolved. Free enterprise, responsible for the results of its enterprise to the government, may work. To this solution the B.B.C. is a sort of forerunner. Admittedly, a very limping forerunner. But perhaps the B.B.C. would have been like that anyway. It's very British. It's a slow starter. It will improve.

It's getting dark in the Cathedral. The evening shadows are rising steadily among the soaring pillars. I feel as though I were standing in a tidal river at ebb tide and feeling the insidious, developing tug of the water. Things are moving. The flotsam, congesting the river bank, is beginning to stir uneasily, trying to resist. But the tug, though as yet gentle, is relentless. Or I'll change the metaphor. Sparks are kindling in the rubble. Presently someone will come along who will blow them to a consuming blaze.

This is my first wet day. The sodden sky merges with the vast, melancholy plain. It isn't really vast. But it feels vast. England is a little bit of a place. But on the Devonshire moors, on the Sussex downs, here, one can feel more strangely desolate than on the

Sahara. No—it's not desolation. For you are accompanied. The past encompasses you. The earth under your feet is the dust of strange peoples who nevertheless begot your dust. One day, with luck, you'll be part of them again. In the dank wind you fancy you hear the thundering hoofs of monsters.

They're there now, widely dispersed. They might have been left behind after the withdrawal of some dark, prehistoric flood. The young man in uniform who squelches through the mud beside me speaks of them with a familiar affection.

"Sterlings," he says. "They're just back from Lübeck."

"All of them?"

"No," he says.

We leave it at that. Two groundsmen are working on the underpinnings of a huge outstretched wing.

"Shrapnel?" my guide asks.

"I'd say so, sir. We'll have it fixed in a jiffy."

"They won't be going out again tonight?" I ask.

"Not unless the weather lifts. . . ."

But if the weather lifts they'll be going out again.

There are no other sign of life but ourselves and the two mechanics. The men who returned from Lübeck are asleep somewhere.

Those who did not return will not be mentioned by the survivors, when they wake. The more loved



they had been the more ruthless will be the silence. It's impressive the way people over here find ways to ease the stresses and strains. They seem to know instinctively what can't be borne or how to adjust and balance the intolerable load till it becomes tolerable.

Here silence is the answer.

We return to the grimly utilitarian camp. I'm shown the room where the men are briefed and the room where they tell their subsequent story. The adjutant joins us. It's up to him to sift and re-sift those records, to deal tactfully with men whose nerves are raw, to know their quirks, their strength and their weaknesses—so that the bare truth may be arrived at. It's easy for a youngster to get excited and to see more or less than really happened. The rooms are bare and unsensational. The quarters where these men re-fit themselves seemed to me pretty dreary. There's no trace of that highly polished Hollywood background to which the movies have accustomed us. The nearest town is ten miles away and a man would be hard put to know what to do with it—when he got to it. But at least there's a pub where we can have lunch.

"I asked some of the Canadian boys to meet you," the Englishman says. "I thought you'd be more interested. . . ."

I'm not. I'm annoyed. It's the Scotch, the Welsh, the right sort of Irish and, above all, the disregarded

English I want to meet. Why do these people consistently underplay themselves? Is it modesty? Is it a terrific pride? Belatedly they've been hounded into admitting that 70% of the British war casualties are men from these islands. But it's a truth that will never catch up with the lie. Sometimes the Dominion soldiers themselves are exasperated. They don't want to be overplayed. It was an indignant New Zealander who drew my attention to the fact that an English regiment of artillery made that first heroic stand at Tobruk possible. But who knows it? Who remembers, for how long, who held the seas open for two bitter lonely years, who held back, one might say, with their naked hands, the greatest military force in history? Who smashed Colonel Lindbergh's Invincible Armada? Well, that's all old stuff, of course. Let's say everyone knows it. But who remembers it?

What are the English doing? Oh, my God!

But the Canadians are nice boys. I'd almost heard their groan when they'd be told firmly that their next job was to entertain an interloping female. But they are very amiable about it, though not much more eloquent than their English comrades would have been, and I'm not helping them much. I am an interloper. Nothing I say sounds real. My questions, in my own ears at least, have the quality of an impertinence. Sure. They were in the big Cologne raid. But that's in the

past. No sense in re-hashing it. They came out alive that time. Now there's tomorrow—if the weather clears. The weather and those short summer nights are the devil. But wait till the long nights come. Then perhaps we'll show Berlin.

No one, to my thinking, has done these men justice. Perhaps William Rothenstein in his artist's study of their types has come nearest to realizing their strangeness. They look at you out of his powerful, simple portraits like men from another world. The movies make tragic or flippant buffoons of them. Well, I realize that at a lunch table I'm not seeing them either. No doubt they're flippant. No doubt they josh each other and go on benders. But I don't believe that at any time they lose that salient quality—that austere unhuman remoteness. These young men are like the dying. Their inner vision is fixed on a far horizon. Their deepest concern is no longer ours.

The pub is one of those distressing up-to-date affairs, very spruce and chill and smelling of fresh varnish and warmed not at all by electric fires. Not a heartening, beery, old-time pub. And it's raining more miserably than ever. "It's set in," as the English say.

"I'm afraid you won't see a take-off," my young officer apologizes. "Too bad."

Well, I'm disappointed too. I'm not squeamish. This sort of thing has got to be. If ever we're going

to win this war we've got to face up to holocausts not in the German manner, please God, but in our own. Besides, I'd back myself to go along too without much more than a reasonable qualm or so. Not because I'm brave but because something appears to have happened to me. When I started out on this journey I was rather concerned about Ida Wylie. Now she seems to have got lost in the shuffle. She has acquired a sincere conviction that she is a minute particle of something or other and if the something or other survives, she will. It's that nauseating who-dies-if-England-lives feeling which makes one blush all up one's spine. (The worst of what we call tripe and blah-blah is that it so often hits us right where, in spite of our abashed denials, we live.)

All the same I'm glad these strange young men can sleep tonight.

Poor Hull. Every time a fledgling Nazi gets his wings he tries them over the luckless port, drops a few bombs on some little houses and observes, with that poetry for which the Axis mind is noted, how much the consequent explosion resembles a blossoming rose.

I'm lunching at the Town Hall with the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress, a new elected woman alderman and a dozen members of the Women's

Voluntary Service for Civil Defense. I've met some of their membership before. They bob up where anything dirty or tiresome—it's usually both—has to be done. I was just tiresome. I had to be driven here, there and yon in London, and an elderly woman with a flivver drove me. I never got her name. I believe she had a title, and I know she had a Rolls-Royce because the workers we met en route joshed her about it. (The petrol-devouring monster had, of course, been laid up for the duration.) She was one of those oddities that the English social system tosses up from time to time, out of the depths of its conventionality. She had a passion for anthropology which she seemed to think would help us to deal intelligently with the otherwise unintelligible German after the War. But she drove well and she knew her London like a taxi driver.

The W.V.S. was established by the Dowager Lady Reading at the request of the Home Secretary in 1938 for the purpose of uniting the women of Great Britain for the defense of their homes and families against air attack. (So, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the government of that period must have been thinking about something.)

Before I started out from London on this journey I met Lady Reading in the W.V.S. office. A huge map of her territory hung behind her. Conspicuously alone was an inconspicuous photograph of her famous hus-

band, the late Viceroy of India. Lady Reading was a handsome, vigorous woman, afire with enthusiasm but with no trace of that aggressiveness that springs from an inferiority complex. She was sure of herself and she reassured me more than she knew. When I lived in England she and her position wouldn't have meant so much to me. But I've been round since then and a lot of ugly things have happened. I remembered that Disraeli and Lord Reading had held the highest offices this country has to offer its citizens. Now this Jewish lady was at the head of a million and a quarter English women, most of whom, I suppose, are what Hitler calls Aryans. I've no doubt that the fact would give him a lot of satisfaction. It would prove his argument that the English are Jew-ridden. But Hitler's arguments are amongst his worst handicaps. The English aren't Jew-ridden. One of my first impressions when I began to wander round London was that there weren't any Jews at all. And then I began to realize that they were there all right but that they weren't bunched together, like an uneasy tribe trying to maintain itself in a hostile country. They didn't stick out like sore thumbs probably because they weren't sore. They were no more conspicuous than Catholics or Latter Day Saints or Christian Scientists. They were English. And after all there isn't anything conspicuous in being English in England. What anti-Semitism

there is, is a whipped-up, discredited sentiment to be found, perhaps not so strangely among the poorer aliens and the High Crusters who have only just arrived on the crust. By and large the English won't stand for it. They don't like segregated minorities in their midst, and they won't have people hounded, especially if, as the Jews have done, they have served their country well. England is a melting pot and what it melts, it melts.

Anyhow here I am with twelve of Lady Reading's volunteers. They wear a neat, dark-green uniform that doesn't shriek "uniform" at you, and their activities range alphabetically from ambulance drivers through cooks, canteen workers, air-shelter marshals to wardens for the A.R.P. Since all eligible women between 19 and 41 are either "directed" into industry or are with the armed forces, the W.V.S. takes in those who for domestic, health or age reasons cannot be drafted. I should say, in spite of statements to the contrary, that the vast majority of them are Ladies.

Well, you may abolish the Monarchy and install Communism in England, but I doubt if any force on earth could abolish the English Lady. She's not only tough. She's resilient. She's the surviving sort. You can make all the fun you like of her. But she has quality. She may infuriate you with her limitations, but within those limitations she functions with cour-

age and an undeviating sense of duty. Once in a while she breaks out of her limitations with a bang, and then you get a Lady Helen Stanhope, a Florence Nightingale or a Gertrude Bell. Anyhow, the W.V.S. functions with fierce energy and efficiency. It barges into slums and suburbs and enlists the no-doubt grimly distrustful housewife into the Housewives Service which teaches neighborly help in trouble and intelligent ways of "coping." It has divided England into twelve regional groups and with implacable energy, runs them.

The Mayorial lunch turns out to be a simple but suave and pleasant function. The Lord Mayor is one of those handsome English gentlemen who grow better looking as they grow older and whose immaculateness convinces you that nothing unpleasant has happened or could happen in their bailiwick. But in this case appearances are misleading.

After lunch I am driven round by the M.O.I. representative to see the sights.

"A lot of people were burned to death there," he mentions with a jerk of the head at a scarred and blackened street corner. In spite of all resolutions that casual announcement does me dirt. Being killed outright is one thing. It's the sort of clean-cut heroic death that you can write and think about and even show on the newsreel. But burning to death—that's something else.



We get our tea—and anyone who says that the English have sacrificed their afternoon tea to the war effort, lies—at a seaman's club established and run by the government. I'm changing my American point of view about governments. Maybe we don't do those institutions justice. Or they're learning. I've seen a lot of oldtime-private-enterprise charities since I've been over here and with one or two exceptions they are drear. I remember particularly a sailors' home near the London docks supported and run by ladies of, I should say, a very ancient vintage, and which would have driven any able-bodied seaman to drink, if that had been any longer possible, or straight back to sea. But this club in Hull is human. It's bright with color and has a cheerful bar, a billiard room and lounges worthy of the name. A couple of regular home-bodies run the place, since Authority, having started something, takes its hand off. For 28 shillings a week a man can get a pleasant room, three good meals and a welcome from folk who probably know him by name. Like the British Post Office which, in spite of Donner and Blitz, is still the most efficient in the world, this is government enterprise and it is good.

This, heaven helping me, is my last industrial town. One more factory and I shall break down and howl on the nearest managerial shoulder. My feet are

sore. My head feels like a sponge at saturation point with facts. Two out of every three persons between fourteen and sixty-five mobilized. Seven out of every ten children between the ages of fourteen and seventeen in war work. Six million more acres under the plough. Naval tonnage produced in the last quarter of 1941 four times as great as that produced in the last quarter before the war; merchant tonnage twice as great. Eighty-seven per cent of the R.A.F. planes at home and 75 per cent abroad British made. Anyone anywhere can get facts like these. But they don't. I didn't. In a way they don't register until you've seen and felt them. England is extended to her limit. And so, incidentally, am I.

This is an industrial town *pur sang*. It carries no pleasant aura from a more gracious past. It is tough and hard and gritty and wears its battle scars with an almost scornful indifference. Perhaps, since it is the home of one-time appeasement it feels it has something to atone for. Today there is nothing of appeasement left in Birmingham. The Chamberlain memory has been laid away out of sight like an unseasonable garment. It is not in tatters because it is not the English habit to rend their leaders for what they know to be basically their own fault. (To my mind this is the best proof of a sound democracy.) They know that Chamberlain, like Hitler, was the symptom of a national

disease—their disease. They have all sorts of explanations as to how they came by it. There was the post-war disillusionment resulting from incredibly silly illusions as to what war could possibly do for anybody, a disgust of the logical and inevitable consequences that degenerated into lassitude and purblindness. They may even argue that Chamberlain, given the existing circumstances, did the best he could, and that the circumstances rest on the shoulders of his predecessors and the people who elected and supported them. They feel guilty. But they are not angry. Indeed, I should say that anger is a luxury to which the British people do not feel themselves entitled. This explains their patience with delays and mismanagement and disappointments. “As ye sow ye shall reap.” The British are reaping, and they know it. What can be claimed for them is that they are reaping with a will. They’ve taken their punishment. They reckon that the time of harvesting this rotten sowing is almost over. Presently they will begin to profit from a new sowing.

This is, I feel sure, a true analysis of the national temper. The British are not ashamed of what they have done since 1939. They think they’ve done pretty well. They were half-armed. Their army was the dust bin into which had drifted the nation’s numbskulls of all classes. For only the exceptional man of intelligence

can endure, for some unlikely end, the dreary brain-numbing routine of a professional army. (This applies to all classes. It is not that the ranker in the British Army can't become a general. It's that the ranker with the capacity to become a general wouldn't be in the ranks. He'd be in business or a profession, or the navy, which, since it offers the perpetual adventure of the sea, is never stupefying.) The navy itself had been whittled down by one dumb pacifist treaty after another. Merchant ships, to oblige Hitler and his British allies who wanted to do business with him at all costs, rotted in harbor. The national conscience had rotted with him. It took supine refuge behind invalid excuses. Spain was not their cup of tea—though Germany and Italy seemed to think it was theirs. No treaty bound them to Czecho-Slovakia. If Germany chose to persecute her own nationals that was her business. But there were moral obligations, and the British ratted on them. They know it. They've started out on the hard road to redemption and atonement. And, on the whole, they've traveled it well—not only with courage and patience but with success. Today things are going badly in Libya, so that people all over the world are apt to forget, that in 1940, 40,000 British defeated in Libya and Abyssinia armies of 36,000 and 260,000 Italians and captured 130,000 prisoners. Or they can think of Syria and Iraq and Malta and their many sea

battles. Greece and Crete were at least honorable disasters—a payment in kind for the spiritual disloyalties of the past. The Battle of Britain will rank as one of the greatest and most decisive victories in history.

No, they're not ashamed. They're proud. But they're humble. That is why they can take American criticism, which is often ignorant and unjust, with patient good temper and why, in their turn, they are not bitter or critical. (I know of only one case of retaliation: a Cockney taxi driver who, having listened in silence to a long tirade of abuse from an American doughboy, uttered the few words, "Pearl Harbor to you!" and fled for his life.) They are not even bitter with the Vichy French. They realize that but for a last-minute miracle they might have gone the same way. Whatever his mistakes and failings, they will never forget Churchill's trumpet blasts of warning in their unregenerate past or that he knew how to call their national spirit from the dust. He represents to them their greatest hour. He is their man.

Those Birmingham folks who, if sometimes gruff in manner, are kindly and hospitable, are a little fussed about their Americans. They know what America has done for British airmen and sailors, and they'd like to reply in kind. But they don't know how. They haven't the food or the house-room or the service, and at best

their ideas of what constitutes a good time have never been scintillating. (There's only one thing sadder than a Midland Sunday, and that's a Scottish Sunday.) For the first time, perhaps, they regard their own blue-noses with regret. They realize at least that an evening spent in their front parlors without even a fire to take the chill off is no way to put heart into a doughboy. Fortunately, the doughboys I've seen didn't look as though they needed heart. They too seemed on the grim side.

I'm in a train on the way to Stratford-on-Avon. This is my present to myself. I'm going to rest my heart and mind, not to mention my feet, where I have so often rested them. The M.O.I. assures me Stratford is not what it was. Most of the hotels have been commandeered and even the "William and Mary" can only give me a room for a night. After that I'll have to fend for myself. But I'm not depressed. Stratford has never, in spite of tourists and commercialism, failed me.

By luck, I've got a seat. The train is a local one and bumbles along peacefully through this lovely countryside. Next to me is an R.A.F. mechanic who is on his way to a hush-hush job. If what he tells me is true, he shouldn't be telling me. But it probably isn't. Men, I discover, cannot resist trying to impress

females, even of the wilted variety. But he's a nice young man. So I've flown over from America? (I'm not above being impressive myself.) Must be an interesting country. Oh, yes. He's met some Americans. No. They don't fraternize much. When they do it usually ends in a free-for-all. Why? Oh, this and that. Sometimes it starts with the beer question. The Americans like beer iced and the British like it as they would get it anyhow—lukewarm. One thing leads to another.

“But they're good fighters,” the mechanic says. He makes a playful gesture of covering up, and the carriage full of local citizenry grin slyly to themselves. (They've been listening avidly behind a smokescreen of knitting and the evening newspapers.) He doesn't seem to bear any ill-will.

People who care as I do about Anglo-American relations worry about this bellicose attitude of the British and American forces. But it's one of those things that are only serious if they're taken seriously. Men trained to fight are going to fight every chance they get, if it's only to prove how good they are. And any two highly organized and self-conscious groups are bound, given the opportunity, to let fly at each other. The Eton and Harrow boys still, no doubt, and in spite of having other fish to fry, bash in each other's hats and noses, and I'd bet dollars to doughnuts that a company of U.S. Infantry and a company of

U.S. Marines lodged in the same barracks would have a fine assortment of blue and purple mice to show for it. In fact, masses of people never like masses of people, and no individual, except in the rarified seclusion of a library, likes any mass of any sort. (What American loves Americans in a subway at rush hour?) If Americans and English en masse dislike each other rather more than they dislike other nationals, it is mainly because other nationals are on a lower level and can be treated therefore with that well-known and exasperating Anglo-Saxon toleration. What we've got to hang onto with whatever intelligence has been granted us is that when it comes to vital issues, Americans and British, whether they like each other or not, fight on the same side. Like Malvolio, they think nobly of the human soul. That, in all its implications, covers their creed. For it they will fight and die together—beer and other trifles notwithstanding.

There is however one practical method of keeping off each other's toes. We might stop judging each other's past record by present-day morality. This is a game very prevalent in the anti-British Middle West and it's no fair. Both countries have sinned before God and man. But a lot of their sins were considered high-class virtues at the time they were committed; and to yell, "Look what you did to the Saxons in 1066!" is one of the most futile cat-calls, and leads to inevita-



ble and caustic counter-cat-calls. Let's call our pasts a day and get on with our presents.

Incidentally, and to revert to doughboys for a moment, those I have met are rather cynically amused by the earnest booklet which has been handed out to them as a guide to the curiosities of British coinage and behavior. They guess that they're just about bright enough to distinguish between a two-shilling piece and a half-crown. And the almost agonized explanations regarding British reticence has made the American soldier regard any Britisher who ventures to speak kindly to him as up to no good.

## 9

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As Haldane said once, to his undoing, we all have our spiritual homes. One of mine is Stratford. I've always been happy there. The sun has always shone for me, so that I cannot imagine it other than serenely beautiful. It isn't only beautiful. The town has sturdiness and self-reliance. It is the heart of England. Tourists and commercialism haven't touched it. There is astonishingly little commercialism, and the tourists come and go like summer flies. Stratford is a bustling market town anyhow, and its citizens regard William, I think, as a bit of a nuisance—one of those showy relatives who obscure the fact that his kin could have got on

very well without him. Even Marie Corelli, who thought she was quite a swan herself and decided by her presence to furbish up Stratford's faded glory, got her come-uppance from the townspeople to whom she was, unlike William, an outsider. And, besides, they'd had had enough of literary folk. Her handsome house on the main street is a monument to a monumental defeat. The last time I was there, Miss Vyver, her companion and friend, showed me Marie's manuscripts under their glass coverings. She even took one of them out and let me touch it, her gnarled hands trembling with a tender reverence. I bated my breath too and told her how as a precocious child (I might have added, with no judgment, but didn't) I had devoured everything Marie had written. The old lady had tears in her eyes and from thence on she clung to me as friend and rescuer from oblivion. It was all very sad. For who knows or cares now that *The Mighty Atom* once rocked the English-reading world?

The last time I arrived at Stratford by train I must have been a school girl. At least I'd forgotten that the station, for some obscure English reason, is two miles from the town and an extra mile to the "William and Mary." But there used to be taxis and porters. There are none now. I start out with a light suitcase. It is

rapidly taking on the weight and obstructive proportions of a steamer trunk. An elderly gentleman, on his way home, offers to share the burden with me and we proceed together, the suitcase bumping between us, in pleasant silence.

"I've just flown over from America," I mention, after the first mile.

It's my favorite opening gambit. It's partly a show-off, partly an effort to get a rise out of those wary trout. Invariably it fails.

"Oh, really?" my companion murmurs. Whereupon we both take refuge with the weather. Which is perfect. There's no possible argument about it.

I imagine that this national habit of letting you fall, conversationally speaking, flat on your face, has developed more Anglophobia than any other quirk. In the last war an ardent young American officer, just landed and afire with "Mother-England-here-we-come" emotion caught sight of two British majors standing on the dock. It was a great moment—almost an historical moment. The American stepped up to the two Britishers and saluted smartly. "Lieutenant Briggs—Infantry, U.S.A." The two majors looked him up and down and dropped that ineffable and deadly, "Oh, really?" Whereupon the lieutenant who had come over to fight the Germans wished he could take a crack at the English first.

But it isn't only the English. Three years ago, in Scotland, I developed the mistaken urge to write a Scotch novel, and bogging down early and badly in clan-trouble, wrote to a Scottish chieftain, then the Lord Lyon (but we won't go into that) for help. As a result I had a warm invitation from him and his wife to spend a night at their home on the way back to England. It was a lovely place. The Laird, all tartans and lace ruffles and buckled shoes, and his sweet, less-ornate, young wife entertained me graciously. All that chill Scotch evening we sat in their vast drawing room before a noble but lifeless fireplace and talked about clans. When they failed us and the silence threatened to become intimate we fled back, like shipwrecked sailors to a raft, to the weather. Not a personal question escaped us. I think, given time, they'd have got round to finding out who I was, what I was up to and where I came from. Or I might have been driven to telling them and to asking in turn if the portrait of the little boy on the side-table was their son. Even the next morning I seemed to recognize symptoms of a wistful, sternly repressed interest in me. But as I had to leave after breakfast I never knew for certain.

There are several explanations for this damping impersonality. The most popular is, of course, a painful spiritual shyness, a deadly fear not so much of intrusion, as of intruding. But I think there's more

to it. The English and Scotch, unlike the Irish and the Welsh, function mainly from their subconscious. They don't know how it functions and they are never sure of it. They do know from experience that unless they keep a sharp eye on it, it's liable to break out in a big way. (The two majors, for instance, might have thrown their arms round the American, as their Elizabethan ancestors would have done, and kissed him on both cheeks.) So they stand guard over it and defend it, usually with the weather, against any stimulus that might set it off on a tear. Americans who are not normally or to the same degree affected with a subconscious and who are consequently over and above-board with all they've got (I'm not including the New Englander) feel themselves snubbed and baffled.

I do too.

The last time I was in Stratford I stayed at Fanny Bradshaw's Fortnight Hostelry. Fanny had had the bright idea to make a summer center for Americans and others who wanted to take their Shakespeare leisurely, comfortably and even intelligently. They stayed for two weeks and went to the plays and lectures given by the actors and made the rounds of the best pubs. Fanny is one of those amazing American women who look as though they spent their butterfly-lives in beauty parlors and who run a profession, a

social life, a home and a handful of committees. In addition to being a serene hostess to sometimes temperamental guests—and this is no reflection on her eminent sobriety—Fanny was the best-informed pub-crawler in my acquaintance. She knew every worthwhile pub in Warwickshire, and, on summer evenings, if we weren't at the theatre, we'd run the gamut from "The Swan" known more familiarly as "The Dirty Duck" on the Avon to a cosy little fifteenth-century haunt, "The Fleece" at Bretforton, twenty-five miles away, which has been in the same family for five centuries and whose ale, not to mention the pewter tankards, makes your mouth water. In the wee small hours we'd bumble home, sober and sleepy and content.

Poor Fanny. My cable of greetings from her old stamping ground will start a nostalgic tear in her blue eye. As for me, twenty-five miles now is almost as negotiable as three thousand. This time I'll get no further in my pilgrimage than "The Dirty Duck."

Meantime here's the High Street. To my tired eyes it looks unchanged. But Flying Cadets have taken over the Shakespeare Hotel and their imaginable ribaldry concerning the nomenclature of their sleeping-quarters reminds me, footsore as I am, of a rather neat Elizabethan jest that I once cracked myself. At long last my companion, my suitcase and I come to rest at

the "William and Mary." I say, "Thanks, awfully." He lifts his hat. "Oh, not at all."

And that's that.

It's seven o'clock. In half an hour the curtain of the Festival Theatre is going up on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I swallow some dinner and hurry down the familiar lanes. It's a long time since I've felt so urgently that the curtain must not rise without me.

There's a queer thing about Shakespeare's comedies. They aren't really very funny and some of the humor is archaic. An American might take a crack at us and say that that's why we laugh so boisterously over them. Well, we do. And, accustomed as I am to the best that Broadway can do in slick, streamlined fun, I split my sides, even when I don't quite know what I'm laughing about. Something young and unspoilt and hearty is evoked in me.

Tonight everything goes with a bang. Maybe some of the Titania's sprites are a bit lantern-jawed and inclined to sag at the knees. But William, hovering in the wings, infects the oldest and tireddest actor with his lustiness. Bottom is played by a regular vaudevillian, a direct descendant of Dan Leno and Robey and Marie Lloyd and of the buffoons of William's day. He plays straight to us groundlings who roar back at him. This



isn't the silly guffawing of that London audience at that silly show which paralyzed even poor Beatrice Lillie's wit. This is good laughter from a sound heart.

In the interval I drift out, as of old, onto the terrace and watch the Avon sliding by immortally under the evening sun, and toss fragments of stale sandwich to the proud swans.

The "William and Mary," congested to capacity, threatens me with eviction. But I'm not quitting Stratford. If the worst comes to the worst I might take refuge in a hayrick. It's sweet summer weather, and it wouldn't be so bad. But as it happens my bedtime problem is charmingly resolved. Opposite the inn is Susannah Shakespeare's home. It belongs to an American woman, Miss McCleod, whom I met in New York. She's a friend of Fanny's and gave Fanny permission to show her guests over the unique Elizabethan house. As I passed it, looking up wistfully at its diamond-paned windows, a nice homebody comes out to pick up the morning paper. I recognize Mrs. Tims, Miss McCleod's housekeeper. We start an idle friendly chat. I ask if Miss McCleod is at home—I know she isn't—and remember happier days. One thing leads to another—including my homeless state. To cut the story short here I am safely lodged in Shakespeare's daughter's bedroom. This splendid Elizabethan four-

poster may have been hers too. I am looking out of an open, latticed window on her garden bright as it must have been in her days with flowers and singing birds. Mrs. Tims and I have already wrestled with my emergency ration book. With the result that on my delicately laid breakfast tray I find a whiff of butter and my first English new-laid egg. I eat the latter slowly and reverently and hope that Miss McCleod won't mind when she hears that I've crashed her gates. She won't, if I know her, or if she knows what Piers Plowman would have called "my sweet content."

But all this wouldn't have happened, I think, three years ago.

I'm dining with Iden Payne, the director of the Festival Theatre. He knows America well and loves it for the right reasons and not because it is bigger and therefore better, and that pleases me almost as much as when I meet Americans who love England—not because she is a picturesque old ruin but because she is alive and striving.

The theatre has had good seasons all through the war. There's still plenty of audience, but actors and actresses are running short, and the props will be on their last legs too before long. There's nothing much, we realize, that can be done about the theatre in a total war. The London stage, with two exceptions—

and one exception was an American play, *Watch on the Rhine* which an English oldtimer, Athlene Sayer, raised to, I think, greater significance—was deplorable. The war plays were half-digested fragments from a too violent and recent experience, and thrown up in haste. The actors were too old and tired, the scenery and costumes either shabby or tawdry. There was an atmosphere of almost petulant impatience about some of the productions, as though nobody could really give their minds to what they were doing. *Blithe Spirit*, that in New York had glittered like a highly polished semi-precious stone, drooped on the London stage like a wilted lily. But there was that other exception, a foolish, slapstick musical comedy, held on its feet by Jack Hulbert and Cecily Courtneidge—two oldtimers who were in their prime in the last war. They carried the matinee uproariously for three mortal hours. They were to go on again for another three hours at six o'clock. In her half-hour's breathing space Cecily scampered down into the foyer to snaffle a collection for her pet war charity. The merciless daylight did not soften even for her. She didn't care. She exposed her age with gallantry and humor and confidence. Her wrinkles said, "I'm an old war horse." But her eyes said, "And I can still prance better than the best." Besides, she knew her Londoners who only really love their actors and actresses when they are old. It's as

though they had to earn their right by faithfulness to a place in the family heart. It must be very comforting to know that when you're really decrepit and can't remember your lines you will be London's darling.

I am reminded of a story about Ellen Terry. She was playing, in her old age, the nurse to Doris Keene's rather ill-advised Juliet. The latter's manager had had the bad taste to bill her over Ellen Terry with the result that Doris' entry was made to a glacial silence whereas when Ellen appeared the whole theatre rose to her. The poor old lady, whose memory had gone anyhow, was swept away from the present by that familiar greeting, into the glowing past. She was Juliet again. Smiling, radiant, she broke into Juliet's lines.

And the whole theatre stood silent and wept.

The man who told me this story said he was present himself. So it probably isn't true. But it ought to be. It symbolizes the curiously deep and emotional relationship between the English and their players.

I spent this Sunday morning in church. I was the only woman present and I hid coyly behind the Font. The congregation of Flying Cadets raised their young male voices exultantly to the ancient rafters. Afterward I watched them reassemble in the churchyard and march off smartly. They looked little more than earnest, rosy-cheeked children. And in a month or

two, I suppose, they will be flying through the night to Germany. Some of them, like those men of Lübeck, will not come back.

Now I'm lunching with an old friend of Fanny's. I met her casually the last time I was here, and I'll admit that I thought her an efficient, conscientious but rather hard, conservative-minded woman. She seems to me, like so many of the people I've met, gentler, more lovable. She looks as strong as ever but a faint wanness under her eyes becomes her. She's a Justice of the Peace, a leading force in the W.V.S., and she is running her local organizations as efficiently as ever. But I think differently. During the Blitz at Coventry her home was a refuge for the homeless and the tormented. She tells me how one night a van-load of eleven, all one family, including seven children and Grandma, landed on her doorstep. They'd been bombed out twice in rapid succession, once out of their home, and once out of a shelter. When Pa and Ma saw the bedroom allotted them, Ma said, "Bill, ain't we in luck?" But Grandma was a bit of a card. Pa intimated privately to Mrs. E. that if one of them bombs had taken Grandma it wouldn't have been wholly a bad bomb.

This afternoon is my last in Stratford. I am lying on the grass by the Avon, looking toward the church

spire rising delicately above the trees. It's one of the most famous views in the world. But it has never become commonplace. A bird is singing somewhere overhead. Girls and boys and old people are scattered about me in sleepy or quietly talking groups. Across the river on the playing field white-clad cricketers are playing their everlasting game. I can just hear the brisk, cheerful snap of the ball.

Nothing, it seems, has happened. But this unchangedness no longer frightens or distresses me. I'm beginning to understand it. Stratford has taught me to understand. These people are, without knowing it, a wise people. They've come a long way and they've got a long way to go. They can't afford a lot of waste motion of anger or indignation or depression or even enthusiasm. They can't even afford to lift their eyes to their goal. It's too far off. They march steadily, patiently, keeping to the middle of the road, not fussing when it's bad and not rejoicing overly when it's better. It's not business as usual. It's the war as usual.

Anyhow, it's proper that the heart of England should beat to its accustomed rhythm. Today it seems to me not only the heart of England but the heart of civilization. From now on it'll be easier to take the advice of my old friends here. "Don't worry so much about us," they've so often said to me. "We're all right."

I believe them.

Well, good-bye, Mrs. Tims. Thanks for the new-laid egg and everything. Good-bye, Stratford—this time—for how long?

# 10

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Just before my train pulls out a rather flustered individual thrusts two plucked and scrawny chickens through the window, almost into my face.

"Bargains!" he pants.

Everyone in the crowded carriage smiles. Presumably he races down as much of the train as he can manage and with equal lack of patrons, for in our last glimpse of him he is standing frustrated on the platform, a chicken dangling from either hand.

The Home Guarder opposite me sticks out his head and waves to him.

"That's what they call the Black Market," he an-



nounces, with the pleased air of having at last run to earth a rare but much rumored quarry.

I would like to ask the general opinion on the subject. But it would show a curiosity not natural in a native, and I've an idea that if the Home Guarder knew I'd recently dropped from the skies he'd shut up like a clam. He might even take me prisoner. The railway carriage is bright with humorous cartoons that mock the unwary who are loose-tongued with just such as I.

Elements in America unfriendly to Great Britain have made much of the Black Market as proving a general rottenness and the unbroken stranglehold of the rich in the best that money can buy. I'm inclined to think that the B.M. consists largely of such episodes as Mr. Jones, the grocer, slipping his old friend, Mrs. Brown, an egg that he has been saving for her behind his counter. (I have heard a story of a farmer selling a ham to a rich neighbor for £7. The story was told me as a joke against the buyer. If anyone were silly enough to pay £7 for a ham—well, he could have it.) So that the B.M. seems to me a mainly rather harmless exhibition of not entirely reprehensible human frailty. Where it has shown serious dimensions the prison door has slammed down on it with a resounding clang and no nonsense any more of a light fine. The English may be this, that and the other. But they have never taken

to racketeering. Any government that tolerated it would get short shrift—and it must be remembered that the control of the British people over their government is the most direct and swift in the world. That, at least, is my present judgment. But I'll dig deeper when I get back to London, whose better restaurants still assail my nostrils with suspiciously appetizing odors.

The Home Guard is a wiry, streamlined version of Old Bill. He must be in his forties and looks tired, as though he hadn't slept. I've seen a lot of this kind, well-armed men whose battle-dress adds to their tough, no-nonsense-about-us bearing. Before the war they probably spent their Sundays snoozing over the paper or puttering in their gardens and growing elderly. Now, as one factory manager told me—he was a captain in the Home Guard himself—they do their sixty-hour week in the factory and then on Saturday afternoon they kiss their families good-bye and disappear into the blue. Late Sunday night or early Monday morning they'll show up again, looking like brigands. But when the factory whistle blows they'll be on their job. The manager who has gone with them knows just how their feet feel and they know he knows. I asked a foreman who had just come back from a week-end maneuver with a regiment of Regu-

lars how he stood it. He said he stood it all right. He liked it. I can see why. It isn't often a middle-aged man can recapture his youth or flatter himself he's the defender of his home and family. Old Bill opposite may look tired. But he looks pleased with himself and consequently with the world at large.

I wonder if Hitler hasn't done Great Britain a great service. To be sure he's done it the hard way. But maybe it was the only way it could be done. I seem to remember that somewhere in that immense illiterate tome of his he speaks of his fear of doing just that—of kicking his most feared enemy to her feet.

A City Father meets me at my destination, and over dinner we talk some more about the Home Guard. We're very near the coast, and for weeks the navy, an outnumbered Air Force and these untrained men were all that stood between this ancient city and the greatest military force in history. The City Father had fought in the last war and commanded a battalion of the Home Guard in its sequel. After Dunkirk he had 1,500 men under his command, and they armed themselves with sticks and knives.

Whenever these people speak of Dunkirk it is with a curious change of voice. Under their apparent sobriety of temperament they are mystics, who from time to time throw up a great poet to speak for them,

or a great orator like Churchill. Dunkirk was their greatest hour. One day, far distant, it may become a saga comparable to the passing of the Israelites over the Red Sea.

It was a miracle—more of a miracle than perhaps we realize. Not only an army was saved. A nation was reborn.

“We were together,” the City Father says, in that strange voice. Even at this distance of time you can feel how the fires kindled all over England, like the beacons on the Tors and downs that warned the Elizabethans of the coming of the Armada.

The fires may have died down a little. They are waiting for the first wind of offensive action to blow them to a blaze.

Listening to that story I wonder if by a grim paradox France didn't save Great Britain. If she had not fallen, perhaps this country could not have endured a repetition of the last war with hundreds of thousands of her men slaughtered on a foreign soil for some unclear cause. But the war came home. The people were together. They knew beyond question why they fought and died—not only for this land but for a way of life which they believed common to all decent peoples. It may be that Hitler's spectacular victory over France was his first great disaster. For it brought his one feared enemy up standing.

In his long red robe the Canon glides ahead of me like a lambent flame down the dim aisles of Exeter's shattered Cathedral. All the windows have been blown out and unless something is done about them the air will nip the congregations shrewdly when winter comes. The main fabric stands. But there are wounds everywhere, and one chapel has gone under a direct hit. Its million fragments have been collected in baskets and one day will be painstakingly put together, and the Cathedral will stand in its old glory. The Canon and the City Father discuss the night of havoc dispassionately. They express no resentment. The Germans are not mentioned at all. "They" and "it" are the nearest approach to personalities. If the airman who had struck this Cathedral had landed amidst its fragments, these people would have bound his wounds and given him that cup of tea, which is their first answer to all tribulation, and a cigarette. They would have acted thus, partly out of an old tradition that once a man is down he ceases to be an enemy and becomes a brother, but much more, I think, because they would not be able to associate him with his own act. I get more and more the impression that the people of this island do not believe way down in that subconscious of which I have spoken, that what is happening in the world today, is human. They just do not believe that a man with two

eyes and a nose like themselves could perpetrate the bestialities with which they have become familiar. Something perpetrated them. But not surely this man. He too must be a sort of victim.

Their consequent lack of anger which at first alarmed me is beginning to reveal itself as a reassuring strength in the present conflict, and a no less terrifying weakness in the future peace. Anger burns itself out. Hate consumes the hater no less than the hated. Essentially it is weak. And to hate an impersonal force is silly. To think of compromising with it is even sillier. You can't come to terms with a typhoon. You've got to sail it out or perish.

Or put it more vulgarly. It's as though the plumbing of the house had gone wrong. It's no use getting mad with it. You've got to tackle it. If the plumber makes mistakes—well, the mistakes will have to be put right too. There's no possible living in a house with the water supply contaminated. That's why, I think, people here are a little impatient with me when I moan about what's happening in Libya. Of course it's exasperating. The plumber ought to be sacked. But the job will be done just the same for the good reason that it has to be done. It's no use getting fussed. It's waste of energy. And we need all we've got.

So I am assured that the British, dispassionate as they may seem, are not even remotely concerned with ideas

of compromise, let alone defeat. But I am desperately afraid that when the war is won and the Britisher sees the German face to face and that the German face appears to be very like his own ("After all, he's quite a decent chap") he will do his damndest to turn victory into another and this time final defeat.

The City Father and I trudge for miles and miles over this sorely wounded city. It's only a few weeks ago that the Germans made this particular Baedeker raid, and the wounds are still raw and bleeding. Men are still digging in the rubble. The siren goes off twice in the course of the afternoon, but no one takes any notice of it.

"We usually turn 'them' back at the coast," the City Father says.

We go into a small workman's house whose windows are boarded up, waiting for an improbable glazier, and I'm shown a Morrison Shelter, a reinforced steel table under which the family had crawled and slept after a fashion.

"Of course it wouldn't do for a direct hit," the owner remarks composedly. "But it gives you a nice cosy feeling."

Everyone agrees that if you get a direct hit you're for it—no matter where you are. The idea seems to cause them a sort of sardonic amusement.

This is my last night in Exeter, and the City Father brings his wife to join me at dinner. She's a delicate-looking, pretty woman, dressed with charming care, and both she and her husband seem to regard this unexciting hotel dinner as an enormous treat—a regular binge, in fact. They're both quite gay and excited about it. The City Father had told me a lot about his wife. It was as though he had to tell someone about her. He said, "You know, it's a fact the women are braver than us men. My wife's braver than I am. I have to be up and doing things. But she can sit quiet and tell the children fairy stories. . . ."

He spoke with a proud humility. I don't think he'd known what kind of a woman his wife was until the Blitz had struck them. What he knows now he will never forget.

They have three children. The eldest is a girl of eleven. The youngest is a baby. But the girl is old enough and wise enough to be left in charge. The children too have learned to "cope."

There's an antique shop in New York in whose front window there stood, the last time I passed, a wooden fox. Something about it reminded me of those effigies outside Chartres Cathedral. It had something of the same Gothic elegance. Besides, my family crest consists of a fox (running, no doubt, for its life) and



I wanted the creature. It wasn't an antique. Some English craftsman had carved it and sent it over. It was beyond my means. I patted the fox's arrogant head and parted from it with a pang of frustrated ownership.

I was puttering this morning in an old antique shop back of the Cathedral. And there in the dusty shadows was my fox's brother. Yes, the old antique dealer said, it was the work of an Exeter man. He'd sent its fellow to New York. There—I could see for myself, a picture of it in *The Connoisseur*. Poor fellow. He was killed in the Blitz. So this was his last work.

Well, it seems too much like the pointing finger of Destiny. If a certain ship makes port I'm going to have my fox.

Out here in the country I'm realizing more and more how circumscribed life has become. I'd wanted to drive out to Tiverton to see Jimmy's wife, twenty-five miles away. But twenty-five miles is too far these days. Jimmy was a British sailor whose real name was Fred, so they called him Jimmy. He spent two weeks leave with us on our New Jersey farm. He and a pal of his, having escaped from a couple of sinkings, had come down with malaria, but his pal was too sick to accompany him. So Jimmy arrived alone on New

Year's Eve right in the middle of a full-dress party. It was pretty much of an ordeal for any stranger—let alone a simple British “rating.” But I needn't have worried for him. No man of the world could have borne himself with a more untroubled dignity. At dinner he sat next a woman who, though not an Anglophobe, is one of those Americans who for some obscure reason carries, where the English are concerned, a chip on the shoulder. In reply to some rather caustic remark concerning the English attitude toward America, he returned, in his soft Devonshire voice, “Oh, Miss, we don't feel like that at all. We'll never forget what America did for us. . . .”

I saw sudden tears come into her eyes. In his simple directness he had knocked the chip off forever. I was proud of him.

Jimmy had been fifteen years in the Navy and two years away from home. We cabled his New Year's greetings to his wife. When he got better he helped about the farm and got matey with some men working at another farm down the road and who had never met an Englishman before. He planted our Christmas tree for us. It's doing well. I see it when I look out of my bookroom window.

Whilst he was with us a letter he had written his pal in the Brooklyn Hospital came back, marked sim-

ply and brutally, "Deceased." Jimmy sat with his face hidden, turning the letter over and over in his big hands.

"That vexes me," he said.

Well, when he got home at last he cabled us. And then his wife wrote. She'd been a housemaid before she married Jimmy. No one has ever written me a more lovely letter of thanks for the little we had done. She made me hear the larks singing high over the moors and see her flowers growing in her garden and feel how happy she and Jimmy had been in his short leave. He'd gone again. She hoped it would not be for quite so long this time.

I won't see her, after all. I could only get to Tiverton by bus. And that takes more time than I have to spare. So I'm on my way instead to a foreign port in England.

I'd never heard of it before. It lies in a fold of high cliffs under whose shadow the red-sailed *Jean-Batiste* and the brown-sailed *Marguerite* have taken shelter. In the narrow English streets every second person speaks French or Dutch or Flemish. The English have the slightly abashed air of intruders. Blue-jerseyed fishermen mend their nets on the quay. I try my French on one of them and strike it lucky. The old fellow looks up at me, blinking his blue eyes.

"*Mais, oui*—I brought my whole family over—my

father and mother, who are very old, and my wife and children." He does not tell me how he came, and I do not ask him. Others may make that dark and dangerous passage, and, for all he knows, I may be a Fifth Columnist. He has had his fill of that base breed. But he answers other questions.

"Go back after the war? Well—why should I? It's all right here. The people are good people. I am learning to speak English. My children are going to school. They will be like English children. And besides, things will be bad in France."

The host and hostess of the jolly little harborside pub give me a succulent crab sandwich, and tell me stories of these refugees. They are fine people too—hard-working fisherfolk who ask charity of no one, above all, are not sorry for themselves. It will be a good thing if they do stay on.

(I have a flashback of memory to a little London scene. One night, returning from the theatre to my hotel, I heard music—dance music of all things—in the open space provided by a German bomb. Under the starlight, couples were waltzing decorously to the playing of a concertina. They were French people celebrating the Fourteenth of July as they must have done in Paris—or in their own provincial towns. English and American soldiers stood by watching, a little puzzled, half wanting to join in—but too shy and aware that this wasn't their party.

Presently the accordion player broke into the *Marseillaise* and we all stood at attention and sang with tears in our eyes—and blood too.)

Hundreds of years ago the persecuted Huguenots found refuge in England and brought with them as a gift of gratitude their industry and their genius. Just so this new influx of strangers may add another vigorous strain to the English blood-strain. And what, according to all accounts, the gallant Poles are doing to the Scottish bloodstream—well, only the lassies know.

# 11

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Rachel has rejoined me. Or rather, I have stopped off on my return, at her Essex village and collected her. I know now why she refused to accompany me on my pilgrimage. It was a great experience. Spiritually, I'm feeling my oats. But physically I'm feeling my age. So I'm thankful for a long week-end to get my breath in her cottage which has no modern comforts but is so warmly, hearteningly comfortable. It's like old times to settle down in one of her deep chairs before a fire (specially lighted in my honor and because I'm so Americanized that I can't stand the chill of an English summer evening) and drink tea and sample my

favorite cake, for which Rachel has been saving her butter rations, and have her two bull terriers, Dinah and Bunty, who, like all bull terriers, are convinced that they are lap dogs, pile themselves on top of me. Dinah is mother to my Sarah, grandmother to my Susie and great-grandmother to my George who, I insist, have sent tender messages and are, I hope, languishing for me on my New Jersey farm. I don't know how Rachel keeps her dogs alive and so fit. The mystery of their feeding has been repeatedly explained to me but it's like relativity. I just don't get it. In the first months of the war when invasion seemed a certainty, a great number of people "put down" their pets in much the same spirit as they sent their children overseas, intending thereby to spare them prolonged and unspeakable horrors—with the result that dogs are at a premium and every mutt has its price. No British government would dare crack down on them, except in the last extremity. Dogs and cats are woven too deeply into English life. To tear them out would be to destroy the pattern. Besides, some of them are useful—Mrs. Marshall's very unlikely Pekingese, for instance. Mrs. Marshall lives in the big Elizabethan house down the road, and in the old days she used to weave lovely woolen scarves and linen tablecloths. Now that she has no wool, she collects the hair of her two Pekingese and knits warm, couponless gloves out

of it. I'm taking several pairs for my English friends who this winter are going to need them.

As regards the war and her bull terriers, Rachel had it all worked out. If the Germans really came, a neighboring farmer had promised to save a couple of shots for them. In an air raid she would collect them in her blacked-out living room and give them aspirin to quiet their nerves. When the first air raid did come she carried out her plan with the result that Dinah and Bunty were so dreadfully sick—in the drastic English sense of the term—that neither they nor she knew that a land-mine had blown up at the bottom of their lane. As a matter of fact, the Home Guard who saw it come down thought it was a German parachutist and charged it with fixed bayonet. He realized his mistake just in time to hop over the nearest wall. Fortunately the land-mine exploded in a ditch. It blew out all the windows in a village five miles away, but Rachel's village and even her near-by cottage went unscathed—except for the effects of the aspirin. Land-mines, in the local estimation, are very temperamental.

Today, being Saturday, I walked with Rachel to her Co-op, two miles away, and helped her do her marketing for the week. The village shop was crowded with villagers good-temperedly taking their turn and the pathetic little bits of this and that allotted to them. This unfailing good-temper and cheerfulness is something



I can't get over. It makes me feel obscurely ashamed and uneasy about myself. I'm glad, at least, that with my emergency rations I've been able to add something to Rachel's parcels—five rashers of bacon, two ounces of butter and two ounces of tea, to be exact. Over the tea, especially, Rachel rejoices like a child over an unexpected treat. For the tea-ration hits the English hardest of all the restrictions. Tea, even stewed so that it tastes like nothing at all, is their panacea for all griefs and trials, spiritual and physical. I remember how, after the mild raids in the last war when the gallant boy scouts bugled their heartening "All clear!" Rachel and Lizzy, our maid, our Scotty and I would crawl out from under the kitchen table, and Lizzy, as a matter of course, would set the kettle on the hob. I bet the English still seek comfort in the old way. But how they manage it is another mystery.

Well, the peaceful week-end in Essex is over. This, as Ed Murrow says, is London. The announcement, reaching me on the New Jersey farm, has never ceased to thrill me. Now I can make it myself. It still seems a miracle.

One thing my journey through the length and breadth of England has taught me—how to evaluate London. It's not any more the hub. It's an entry, a

clearing house and to some extent a dump, as perhaps all great cities must be, for the least desirable elements in the nation's life. I doubt if London ever will be again what she was to England. People have learned to decentralize. Big Business has discovered what should have been obvious, that even with the English telephone system, it can function, if anything, better from a quiet country house. It is probable, therefore, that, after the war, a number of big firms will continue to reside on the various ancestral properties where they have taken refuge and build up surrounding communities for their employees. This is one of the changes that will come to rural England. There will be many others. None of them, I think, will be destructive to the countryside's essential beauty. If anything, the country will have come into a new inheritance. Already there are six million more acres under cultivation than before the war, and after the war, with a starving Europe at her doors, England may become almost self-sustaining. The big estates are already broken up. The great historical houses are either passing into the nation's hands or becoming holiday centers for the Trades Unions, hospitals and business houses. There's one scheme afoot for taking over the finest of them and allowing their noble families to continue in residence as custodians. This is a typical Eng-

lish compromise with change and tradition. One can imagine the Duke of X leading his guests (at a shilling a head) through his ancestral gallery.

"And this, ladies and gentlemen, is my great-grandfather, and, though I say it as no doubt shouldn't, a bit of a scallywag. . . ."

One thing is certain. The present owners of the great properties are surrendering their burdens with something like a sigh of relief. The long, heart-breaking struggle to maintain the dead past in a living, changing world, is over. They too have made the full circle. They can go back now to where their race started, and, with their sleeves rolled up, begin to build again.

Rachel and I celebrate our return to London by visiting *Mrs. Miniver*, who has recently arrived. I'd already met her in New York and, with the rest of the audience, had sniffled audibly. I'm eager to see her effect on this audience that knows its Blitz, and on myself in this other environment. I discover that Rachel is sniffing all right but not tearfully and that the audience as a whole seems to feel that it ought to be enthusiastic over this charming picture of its heroisms but that actually it's suffering from acute discomfort. I'm still sufficiently American to be moved. But my emotion strikes me now as a bit phony—like

the picture itself. It's charming, it's gracious, in some essential respects, accurate. But the American picket-fence stands out like a sore thumb (why does Hollywood, that pays such horrific sums to experts, make such trivial but awful errors?), and the Dunkirk pictures are too obviously studio effects. Lady Bellamy is the kind of aristocrat an American audience must import from England, just as an English audience insists on improbable American gangsters. Of course, as Lady of the Manor, she would know the villagers personally, and the Minivers would belong intimately to her social circle. Her attitude toward them therefore is out of date by about a hundred years. Her pride too is all out of focus. Far from grabbing the prize for herself, her arrogance would find its oblique expression in presenting the cup, willy-nilly to the stationmaster. (Besides, as Rachel snorts in my ear, don't "they" know that in England roses and chrysanthemums don't bloom together?)

The whole picture is too sleek for a British audience. It knows from dire experience that the Blitz doesn't end with the Blitz. It goes on for days and nights—no water running, except in the wrong places, the houses without heat or light, dirt and confusion everywhere, the women "coping," their hair all anyhow, the men grimy and unshaved. It doesn't make a pretty picture.

James Hilton, at any rate, must have known all

this. But Hollywood was too much for him. And no doubt Hollywood was right. *Mrs. Miniver* is a translation from English into American terms and perhaps the only translation Americans could endure. If in its own way it puts over the fact that the English are a brave and decent people, Hollywood has not sobbed in vain.

Since Rachel can't distinguish one tune from another (though she professes to recognize "The Men of Harlech") I go alone to the mid-day concert at the National Gallery which, incidentally, was hit twice. Myra Hess is playing with the London Orchestra, Barberolli conducting. She's as noble and generous as ever in her music as in herself. At a buffet luncheon afterward she and I remember our mutual friends in New York and another lunch-hour concert at our Cosmopolitan Club. Now she has just come back from a terrific tour all over Great Britain, playing in small towns and big towns but always to big audiences. The clamor for music is growing louder everywhere.

But I'm a little disappointed in today's audience. I'd read so much of how in the worst of London's travail the tired, distraught workers rested on the Gallery's floor, their backs to the walls and took comfort from the world's music. Now the orderly rows of gilt chairs seem to be mainly occupied by the decrepit

denizens of Knightsbridge. I suppose this is inevitable. The workers have no time any more. Their hour off is spent scrounging for lunch in the overcrowded cheap restaurants. Only fanatics can spare coupons to make sandwiches. However, it's another first step. It may lead to something better. After the war Myra hopes that the National Gallery will carry on and that free concerts for a people making a living and with time to live may become an accepted feature of London's daily life.

I'm lunching with my old friend and publisher, Sir Newman Flower, of the revered firm of Cassells. Three years ago I left him a very sick man preparing to sink into retirement and make way for his rather fragile-looking son. Now Desmond Flower is a tough young officer in a tough Highland Regiment (Newman admits, with a chuckle, that they had a hard time digging up the requisite Scotch ancestor), and his father is back in harness and pulling like a two-year-old. That's the war. It either knocks you out or it sets you up.

Cassells has had a hard time. La Belle Sauvage went west on the big Blitz and the remnants of the firm's stock-in-trade were burnt in two other incidents. Sir Newman, like other publishers, has the best market in years and very little to sell. He's short of paper, type,

workers and writers. It's true to my own experience about the writers. All those I know are in war work. The young and hale are with the fighting forces, the elderly or near elderly have found niches in the various ministries. That firebrand, Arnot Robertson, is burning blithely in the film department of the Ministry of Information. Phyllis Bentley is slaving in a cubbyhole in the same building. Nora James is a handsome major in the A.T.S. And so forth. Even those who for health or other legitimate reasons have stuck to their writing don't know what to write about. They've had their belly full of escapism—twenty-four years of it, to be exact—and it's come near to costing them their civilization. Now they're going to write about the world as it is, or shut up shop. The only escape from the war is the war. It's a total war. They're up to their neck in it. And you can't write about anything in which you are up to your neck. Susan Ertz may be "coping" in her lovely fourteenth-century cottage in Sussex. But her husband is in Egypt—in West Africa, flying on his job she never knows where, and the knife is too near the bone for her to write about it comfortably. G. B. Stern admits that it's difficult for her to view the bomb that blew her out of the Albany with the necessary literary detachment.

So Sir Newman, rarin' to go, finds himself with an almost empty stable.

Our lunch is good. Too good. There are about a dozen places in England where you can get food like this, most of them in London. I'm now definitely of the opinion that though they may be meticulously toeing the lawful line, they should be liquidated. Authority assures me that it wouldn't be worth while. The results, as far as the general food supply is concerned, would be negligible. I still think these gilded hangovers are a mistake. Their sauces may be made of soya beans and shaving cream (their ices certainly are and always have been), but they suggest eggs. And it's a bad suggestion. It's out of tune with the people who don't only talk "austerity" but mean austerity. They want it. They don't want the restrictions on them to be eased. They want them tightened. Not out of any love of austerity per se, but because they want to "get on with the bloody war." And they know it won't be got on with, without the utmost abnegation. As in 1939, the people are miles ahead of their government. Those hotels and restaurants that cling to the appearances of a well-lost world are an offense. They may be frequented by well-meaning, hard-working people. (After all, I'm here myself.) But the habitués should be able to do without the appearances. If they're not, then they're the kind of people this hard-pressed country can do without. If the Ministry of Food, which in general is a popular ministry, will take advice



it will crack down on those last haunts of snooty head-waiters and French menus, and open more honest-to-God five-shilling eating places where the luckless white-collared class can have a chance. The British Restaurants, which, very wisely, have not called themselves communal kitchens, are a reply of sorts to a demand. I've eaten at several of them. They're hearty but of necessity rough. There ought to be some compromise between them and the rarefied joints run for the most part by foreigners whose manners are the only symptom I've encountered of the arrogance and ill-temper that marked the closing stages of the last war. In all my journey through England, often in what we would have once considered exasperating discomfort, I've met none of it. I've not heard an angry, irritable voice or a complaint or seen anyone push or fight for an unfair advantage. The people take their turns as a matter of course in self-imposed order. They are gentle and considerate with each other. I've learned, in the course of my wanderings, to understand their temper. It isn't a symptom, as I had at first feared, of weakness. It isn't like the *Höflichkeits Woche* which had to be imposed on the Germans by decree. It springs direct from their unconscious wisdom. They have all suffered in some way. Rich and poor have endured devastating loss. The bombs fall alike on the just and the unjust. All this is taken for granted. So,

in compassion and understanding, people of all sorts and conditions try to spare each other as they would be spared. No one must add to another's burden which may be already almost intolerable. Thus by a hard road the people have muddled their way within sight of Christianity. I do not mean that they have all become good, let alone godly—the idea would horrify them—but only that they have been forced by rampant paganism to adopt the Christian way of life as the only possible way out of their present ordeal. This has nothing to do with dogma and little or nothing to do with any church. Certain highlights in the Church of England have blazed with unexpected fierceness in the general mirk of mediocrity. But for generations the national Church has been the refuge of the family nincompoop (if he hadn't gone into the Army) who, under the shelter of those well-feathered wings, learned to address his God with the peculiar intonation reserved for that long-suffering Deity. The non-conformist answer to the crisis has been dusty. The Vatican, in my opinion, which is unbiased since I belong to no religious order, has missed a second great opportunity to sweep the world, by preferring diplomacy to martyrdom. So no church has any leading part in this new brotherhood. Yet it has an underglow of religious feeling which differentiates it from the dubious fraternity of the French revolution, and

which, under the breath of some saint with more to offer than a system of hearty he-man ethics, might well blaze into a great revival. So far no saint has shown himself, and whether this brotherhood in arms can continue to burn, without the kindling of a spiritual faith, in the testing time of peace, is a great, perhaps the greatest of all questions.

I suppose, with the introductions lavished on me by enthusiastic friends at a safe distance from the results, I could dwell much more on the Upper Crust than I have been doing. But I find that I've been deliberately evading my golden opportunities. It's not that I'm afraid of finding out that there is a vacuum or a stink under the crust. If the vacuum or the stink is there I ought to know and write about it. It's much more a growing conviction that the Upper Crust is sound at heart and probably not so weak in the head as one might suppose, but that it is just too knowing. It knows all the awful facts. It never seems to know the truth. After Dunkirk, for instance, I'm sure the Upper Crusters, knowing that England was on her last legs, went about the lobbies of Parliament and the drawing rooms of Mayfair, moaning and muttering that there wasn't a gun in the country. If Churchill didn't, it was for the reason that like some other aristocrats he'd made the full circle and come down among

the common people. And the common people didn't know that England was on her last legs. So she wasn't. All that they knew was that they weren't going to be pushed about by a lot of bloody Huns. So they weren't. And the Upper Crusters, slightly but not permanently disconcerted, began digging up more facts with which to mislead themselves and others to the wrong conclusions.

These conclusions are nearly always dark. But never, in my experience, hopelessly black. The other day Tobruk fell. I was having tea with Storm Jameson, who is not only a fine writer but a fine and lovable woman. Her husband, Colonel Chapman, blew in from the War Office, looking as worried as I felt.

"What's giving me a headache," he said, "is the Army of Occupation."

Well, that's as near as I've come to real defeatism in this country. It's rather heartening.

And this morning I had a long talk with Vansittart, who, as everyone knows, locked horns with the Men of Munich and was kicked out of the Foreign Office into the House of Lords for his pains. He's now on his own private war path trying to convince the British people for the third and last time that if they differentiate between the Nazis and the Germans they're digging graves for their children just as surely

as the escapists after the last war, who differentiated between the Germans and the militarists, dug graves for them. Vansittart has been misquoted by his opponents as advocating the entire elimination of the German people. He might think it desirable—I myself think it would save a lot of future trouble—but, as it's impossible, it's silly. His point is that the present-day youngsters in Germany are more soaked in Nazism than even their fathers, and that if they are not controlled in their maturity they will be even more dangerous to our children in theirs. Therefore, nothing will save us but a complete occupation of Germany for at least fifty years, and that occupation must be spiritual and mental as well as physical. If possible, the whole German people must be re-educated and so brought into the community of civilized nations which they have repeatedly tried to destroy. Personally, I'm not too hopeful. I've lived in Germany for years. I've had German friends. And I think there's something queer and wrong about most of them. (And it is the majority that has been decisive.) Perhaps because the Germans never came under Roman Law, perhaps because they had to be hijacked into Christianity by Charlemagne and never really took to it, they have been a terror to their neighbors whenever they had the strength and the opportunity. Almost in one lifetime they have waged five aggressive, unprovoked

wars with the whole-hearted support and sanction of every class, every religious denomination, every political body. Vansittart has written a damning preface to a huge collection of quotations from German writers, statesmen and philosophers from Frederick and Goethe through the Weimar Republic which should convert the most pig-headed wishful thinker. His opponents argue that you can tear quotations out of the context of any people's history to prove anything. But that's simply not true. You could not possibly compile such a collection from the writings and speeches of the American, British or French peoples. Our nations have committed crimes. But they have never attempted to turn crime into a philosophy and a creed. That is an absolute and vital distinction.

Great Britain is torn between Vansittartism and anti-Vansittartism. The Anti's claim that he is making it impossible for the Germans to capitulate, since he can be quoted as demanding their extinction. But this is an obviously silly argument. The German leaders can misquote anybody any time to prove anything they want to prove. And it's not Vansittart or even the English the Germans are worrying about. It's the Poles, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Czechs, the Russians.

It's a disturbing fact that the anti-Vansittarts are in the majority in this all-too-credulous country. Well,

thank God the Poles, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Czechs and the Russians will have their word to say. As a Russian newspaperman said to me, "When peace comes you English can go home and play your damned cricket."

# 12

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It seems to me that every third woman I meet on the London streets is in uniform. The uniforms do credit to their designers and are a great improvement on the girl-guide effects of the last war. (I lunched yesterday with a flight officer in the W.A.A.F.'s who made me feel as prideful and twittery as a nursemaid used to feel when she "walked out" with a Guardsman.) In spite of curls, English women have never looked so smart, and I don't suppose they have ever liked their looks less. The theory that women enjoy swaggering round in uniform has exploded.

It's amusing to observe how the various branches



of the armed forces keep company. The W.A.A.F.'s go with the R.A.F.'s, and the A.T.S. with the Army. The W.R.N.S. don't seem to go with anybody. They're an exclusive crowd, and I don't think indulge in sex except in a very correct way, and then only with the Senior Service. I spent yesterday with their superintendent (their titles are charming—Petty Officer Wren or just plain Wren) at Greenwich Naval College, that noble Queen Anne structure that seems made for pageantry and where naval cadets and Wrens train together. It was a pleasing sight to see these young things lunching side by side in the great Painted Hall and their officers salute each other without any hint of strangeness and patronizing amusement on the male side. Promotion in the W.R.N.S. is from the ranks, but I rather gather that the sieve through which recruits have to pass has a pretty fine mesh. If I closed my eyes and listened to the Petty Officer Wren who escorted me I could almost fancy I was back in my old school ("A jolly decent lot of girls"), and when I mentioned that I was a very old Cheltonian my companion's manner warmed perceptibly. I don't mean that the W.R.N.S. are snobs or that they don't do their jobs with the toughest (and their jobs include cooking, despatch-riding, machine-fitting, wireless operating, etc.), but only that there's more of the famous old-school tie about them than, say, the A.T.S., who

are in a vast majority and a much more come-as-you-are crowd. The latter have been subject to such ill and unjust rumor that a White Paper is to be issued clearing them of aspersions on their morality and sobriety. Personally, they pleased me best. And why a hundred thousand women, torn from their friends and homes and flung together with men in an arduous, often monotonous and dangerous life should be unfailingly moral in the conventional sense, I don't know. It seems a lot to expect, and I am amazed that any of them are "moral" at all. And if any of them can get stimulated on their pay with whisky at 35 shillings a bottle—if you can get it—and beer at its present strength, I can only say more power to them. As a matter of fact I have not yet seen anyone of any sex anywhere at any time even mildly exhilarated. But I *have* spent a day with what is known as a "mixed" anti-aircraft battery, and I acquired a lot of honest respect for the women in it. They were just kids—little girls rather comical in their battle-dress with their curls cascading from under their tin hats. But they do everything but actually fire the guns. The men-gunners, swiveling on their gun-carriages, take their orders from them. The A.T.S. captain who kept me company through the morning's gun-drill explained that it was really a mechanical job. The detectors did the calculating for you, and all you had to do was to keep your head and your eye on the

ball. Well, that may sound easy. But you have to have guts and good nerves to keep either, with the Hun rampaging overhead. One girl has been killed already. Her mates carried on without batting an eyelid till the Blitz was over.

I asked the captain about sex relations. She said they were good. She seemed to feel if not to think they were a shade too good.

"We see the men at breakfast, at dinner, shaved and unshaven, bored and under fire," she said. "And they see us looking like nothing human. We've got so we don't know the difference. We've no glamour for each other any more." She added, in case I was too old to understand, "nothing up our sleeves, you know."

There was a wistful note in her voice. She was a pretty girl. She'd have liked to be glamorous just once before it was too late. She'd have liked, no doubt, to have been swept off her feet by the good-looking gunner major who answered her salute with unsmiling military precision. But she knew him much too well.

I tried to comfort her.

"It'll all come back," I said. She smiled, but not too hopefully.

It will. But it will be glamour with a difference. A certain positive change in the relation of the sexes will, I believe, be permanent. Women have done what

men do and have endured as much in the same way. They will never again be either patronized or exempted. The salute that the soldier gives a woman officer is an acknowledgment that women are no longer sheltered by male courage. They've had to have plenty of their own for themselves and some over for their children. Even in sheer physical endurance they have been proved, if different, in kind, equal in degree. It seems to me that at last the goal for which I once smashed windows has been reached. Men and women stand together as equals.

I do not think they will continue to stand on the same ground. Only exceptional women with a passion for mechanics—and there are some—will stay in heavy industry and probably, if there is conscription after the war, their place with the armed forces will be as temporary as the men's. The majority will go back to the professions, the white-collar jobs and into the home. But the home will be different and the job of running it will be a job like any other and respected as a vital part of the national economy. The little woman will no longer flutter about the nest, waiting for the big male bird to come back with the worms and a patronizing peck as a reward for the day's fluttering. She will be a fellow-worker with the right to the respect and the pay of a fellow-worker.

I've been seeing something of my old school friends. Since they are of my generation they've found no place in the fighting forces or in industry. They just "cope" in general, unrewarded and unsung. It's aged them. They look ten years older than they did when I left them three years ago. But they're fit and cheerful. I don't see quite how or why. They are doing the kind of work for which they are not fitted either by age or experience. They are unpaid servants, house-keepers, and nurses at a time of life when they might be expecting a little physical ease. Their world has crumbled. The chances are they will not live to see more than the birth-pangs of a new world.

Tonight I'm spending an hilarious evening with Muriel and Esmé, who were at Cheltenham with me. Esmé was always a bit of a butterfly who loved dancing, good times, good food and pretty clothes. She's a pretty little thing even now. She and her husband, who is much older than she, have lost most of their money and are probably doling out their capital in the hopes they won't outlive it. They had to give up their London house and are living in a shack on the Sussex hills. It hasn't any plumbing or light or heat or even a telephone. They get their water out of a well and use oil lamps and coal fires—when they can get coal. No servant could or would live with them, even if there was a servant to be had. They live five

miles from their supplies and war work and two miles from their nearest neighbors. Their rations which, by some mysterious process, seem to decrease with the size of the family, barely suffice. They have lived through two of the bitterest winters in living memory. They've picked, in the dead of night, incendiary bombs off their highly inflammable roof. Now they haven't a car. Esmé says the arches of her tiny feet have fallen for keeps and her tummy, through so much standing and walking, has slipped its moorings. She chuckles. It's the same old fat, infectious chuckle.

Muriel is the academic type—a Newnham woman with a first-class degree, who for years was honorary secretary to the International Association of University Women and did a great deal to move Sir Thomas More's old home in the city to Chelsea where, as Crosby Hall, it served the British branch of the association as a lovely and dignified headquarters. Now she and an invalid husband are sharing a suburban house with a large family and she does a major share of housekeeping, dish-washing, floor-scrubbing and keeping a lot of divergent temperaments on an even keel. But the fine serenity I always loved in her has not been ruffled.

"I know how you were worrying about us," she says. "But now you see for yourself that you needn't."

Well, I do see, in a way. But in a way I don't. I

think of the winter that lies ahead. The coal and light rations will be reduced, they say. I think of Rachel with her failing heart, in her little cottage, without help. . . .

However, it's a gay evening in our best tradition.

Grace walks beside me in her Warden's uniform. It's dark blue, like a policeman's, trousers and all. She's slender and tall and well-built, and it becomes her. She wears her tin hat at a dashing angle. Her father was a friend of Cecil Rhodes and a director in de Beers. As things go these days she's still well-to-do. Certainly never before in her life has she lived hard. Now, in these relatively quiet times, she's at her post twenty-four hours a week. During the worst of the Blitz, which hit her genteel neighborhood often and hard, she did not take off her uniform for four nights and days. She's an artist and has always had a lot of what is known politely as the artistic temperament. She has learned to be calm and cool and even-tempered. She has organized her street after the pattern which is obligatory in every street in London. There are always three fire-watchers on the job: middle-aged women for the most part of the upper middle class, women who have lived easy and slept well. The Warden's post in the basement of a near-by house is manned night and day.

It's evening and we stroll down to a large backyard where an instructor who has been through the Fireman's College in Brighton and knows his job is giving a class instruction in fire-fighting. There are ten of us—three young girls who have just left their counters at Harrod's, two elderly men, Grace and myself, and two old women. One of them is certainly in her late sixties. We pull on very dirty boiler-suits whilst workmen build a terrific smoke-fire in a tin hut set up specially for the purpose. The instructor shows us how it is possible to crawl through the thickest smoke, and we prove how right he is on our hands and knees and our noses to the floor. The old lady in front of me jabs me painfully on the nose with her heel. It's a dirty job. But it can be done.

Then we gang up in teams of three and put out a raging furnace with our stirrup-pumps, dashing hither and thither—not too fast and not too slow—like circus dogs under the trainer's lash. The instructor, just to even things up, tosses in an incendiary bomb. The real thing, after two minutes, blows up and kills anyone within a thirty-foot range. So as the old lady in my team points out to me, rather severely, for I tend to be impetuous, you have to be careful with your timing.

On our way home Grace tells me about some more old ladies in her bailiwick. There are five of them who have taken refuge together in one household. One of



them is bed-ridden. They have no servants, of course, and they are a constant anxiety. If a bomb gets them Grace doesn't see how she and her outfit are going to cope. But she supposes they will somehow.

# 13

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I too am out with the Military. A young lieutenant in the Guards to whom I am Acting-Aunt is going with me to the theatre, and afterward taking me for what he describes as “a bite” somewhere. I stipulate that he appear in uniform. This is the first and probably last time I shall have the chance to bask in the subdued rays of its wartime glory. Unfortunately, it’s raining and he and I burst wildly apart across the streets, like a pair of frightened ducks, in pursuit of what looks like an empty taxi and never is. It’s a sign of the times, I think, that even this gilded youngster can’t do a thing about it. Finally we squeeze ourselves, moist and pant-

ing, in a crowded bus and arrive in the middle of the first act.

After a few minutes my six-foot-two companion nudges me softly.

"How about some chocolate?" he whispers.

I retort, "Don't be funny!" in the justifiably annoyed accents of a thirst-crazed sailor on a raft who has been offered a cup of illusionary water. But an authentic bar of Cadbury's finds its way into my clutching hand and from then on to the end of the act the Lady and the Guardsman munch together in damp beatitude. This too, I'm sure, is significant of something. At any rate, I'm convinced that in no previous incarnation has a lieutenant in a British Guards Regiment made such a public demonstration of his boyish humanity.

After the show we splash over to the Savoy for the promised "bite." It's a good one. But for once I'm not exasperated by it. This boy (whom his mother described to me modestly as "a bit of a dear") is enjoying it with a gusto that is perhaps its justification. He's intelligent and talks well. I think he is interested in exchanging ideas with me, and I'm reminded that in England if there is a class system there is at least no age-system which keeps the generations in water-tight compartments. An adult is an adult and the degree of adulthood isn't of primary importance. The young

and the old and the middle-aged sit down to dinner and even meet each other on the tennis courts as a matter of course, and are glad to get from each other the stimulus of youth or the experience if not the wisdom of age. This young man's friends are the friends of his parents and their friends are his. It is also true that the English, perhaps because they tend to improve physically with the years, don't think much about age. They don't limit themselves by it. All my generation are still playing tennis when they have time. Having lived in America I've had to give it up, because it is taken for granted that a woman in her fifties *has* given it up. And I realize that my passion for dancing amounts, among my American friends, to a rather deplorable kittenishness. In England it would be accepted that if I felt like dancing I should dance. I think this isn't so unimportant as it seems. It explains in part the solidarity of this people and also their astounding capacity for endurance.

I discover that my lieutenant is very Leftish in sympathy and ought to be a fish out of water in this Regiment whose officers he considers definitely reactionary. However, they must be tolerant too, after their fashion, for he is not the type to keep his opinions under his hat, and he seems to be doing nicely among them. No doubt they are the pink-faced, too-well-scrubbed young men who offended my vision that

first night at Claridge's. There may be more to them than met my eye. At any rate, my companion thinks that they and their men are having a first rate, very modern and strenuous training. He expects them to do well. In spite of his politics and the fact that he himself belongs much more to the intelligentsia than to the soldiery I realize that he is proud of them.

No, he says gloomily, he doesn't think he has much to look forward to. It's not death on the battlefield he's worrying about. It's that Army of Occupation. For the next ten years, he calculates, he and all his bright young hopes will be bogged down in it. It's very interesting the way the A. of O. overshadows the British outlook.

Very unwisely we stay talking till midnight. The darkness, as we come out into the street, is like a blow between the eyes. We don't mention taxis. There aren't any empty or otherwise. Now there isn't even a bus. The wind lashes the rain into our faces. Only tiny spectral lights mark the street crossings. The streets themselves are canyons of shadow that rise to silhouettes of monstrous buildings cut against the racing clouds behind which the moon hovers like a ghost. It's grim and terrifying and strangely beautiful. I think of the long bitter winters as, clinging to my companion's arm, I stumble on and off the pavements. Every now

and then a lost and faceless soul drifts past us. Otherwise we are alone in a city whose life might have been wiped out in a great catastrophe.

It takes us an hour to get to my hotel. My Guardsman has another five miles to his night's lodging which, with luck, he should reach at daybreak. However, he's used to forced marches, he says, grinning. I discover that I've lost a pair of gloves and that my one and only smart hat is a sodden ruin.

If there are any people living a dissolute night life in this city they must have lots of stamina.

Well, I can buy myself a hat. Perhaps because people can and do manage without them, hats are one of the few articles of wear that aren't rationed. But the gloves, so to speak, are another pair of shoes. They went with my best black suit and, as I'm lunching tomorrow at the House of Commons, I need them for moral support.

It's a queer sensation to wander through Marshall and Snellgrave, where I still have an account, and to realize that neither cash nor credit can buy me a pair of gloves or anything but faded knickknacks that no one would want anyhow. I feel again like a shipwrecked mariner. "Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink."

The nice youngster behind the counter thinks that the Ministry of Supplies might have a heart for my couponless condition.

The Ministry lurks in a back street and is represented by a friendly, elderly gentleman who is most sympathetic. He's sure something, via the usual printed form, can be done for me. One of the questions which I have to answer, as before my Maker at the Day of Judgment is, "How many pairs of gloves have you?" to which I reply honestly and, as I think, modestly, "Two."

The elderly gentleman peering over my shoulder chuckles.

"Two!" he ejaculates. "Do you expect to have three?"

I turn to look at him. And then I laugh. Of course I don't. Why, I don't even *need* my two pairs. In fact I don't need any gloves at all. I don't care if I never have a pair of gloves again.

This is perhaps one of the most illuminating and significant moments of my life. I go out of the Ministry with the light of a new freedom shining in my countenance. I don't need gloves for moral support or anything else. And probably I don't need a lot of other things I thought I needed to be what I am. So that when they're taken away from me too I won't care or

depreciate any more than I'm caring and depreciating now.

I'll be well quit of the lot of them.

The rationing system isn't, of course, so helpful or illuminating to everybody. Some people have a lot to say about it that isn't flattering. They say that it doesn't make for the sort of equality that should accompany equality of effort and sacrifice—in fact, that it works in a reverse ratio. Well, obviously people who can afford to lunch at the Ivy and dine at the Dorchester have better and more food if not more nourishment than those who scramble for a meal at the British Restaurants or at Lyons. It may be true that a coupon will only buy one pair of shoes. But a pair of shoes costing £5 is worth in wear two pairs of shoes costing 15/ and a mink coat is a mink coat for a' that. Nevertheless, the rich are eating less and the poor are eating more. The number of people who can afford £5 for a pair of shoes let alone mink coats is dwindling, and the number who will be able to afford the good-looking moderate priced "Austerity" clothes designed by the government and already on the market, is increasing. Class distinctions have not been wiped out. But they are definitely blurred. Another stout rub or two and they'll be indecipherable. It may be that the un-



fortunate middle class, who are, as usual in a national crisis, getting it coming and going, will be the final survivors.

I tend to disregard what the statistically minded know as "facts." So I might be skeptical of what Miss Horsburgh, the only woman Cabinet Minister who functions in the Ministry of Health tells me about the general well-being of the people if I hadn't seen for myself how much better they are looking. Perhaps because they have acquired moral dignity they bear themselves well. They don't slouch and shuffle as they did. They may look very tired. But their eyes are clear and their complexions clean. Many of them are being fed well, as far as nutrition values are concerned, for the first time in their lives. Mrs. Jones' favorite lunch of bread and "marge" washed down by a dreadful stewed concoction known as tea has been replaced whether she likes it or not, by a hearty, well-balanced meal at her canteen. Her children are being cared for by inches. They get all the milk they can swallow and a lot more than they like and all the fruit there is. I've seen day nurseries in the slums, amidst the ruins of homes that ought to have been ruins long ago, that are like bright patches of sunlight and where the children are plump and rosy-cheeked as country children are supposed to be and so often aren't. Even the upper

classes have improved. In the theatres and restaurants I haven't seen a single specimen of those dreadful young men who used to crawl up and down the grand staircase at Covent Garden like white worms emerging from a tomb. Have they been mercifully Blitzed out of existence? Or have they been weatherbeaten and war-worn out of recognition? I don't know. I only know they've vanished.

As to the failure of that dreaded epidemic to manifest itself it's grimly true, no doubt, that the London slum-dweller's low standard of living saved them. They were conditioned to crowded, unsanitary conditions and immune to bugs, either of the English or American variety. They could take the worst the worst shelters could inflict on them and then some. (Incidentally, only 3% of the London population used the shelters at all.) Also they got prompt medical care for ailments that in an ordinary way would have progressed unchecked. Anyhow, the fact that these ill-fed, badly-housed people survived where the pampered darlings of civilization would probably have perished arouses some uneasy reflections as to whether one of these fine days we shan't pamper ourselves out of existence. Wrapped in cellophane we may one day be caught by some new and enterprising germ, as the vulgar have it, with our pants down.

This has been my day with the Mother of Parliaments. Escorted by an austere-faced usher in knee-breeches, I sneak reverently into the public gallery and listen to a maiden speech and a debate on supplies. It's not exciting. A handful of members, remembering no doubt how they agonized over their historical moment, listen courteously and applaud the new member's brief, carefully memorized effort. A woman member gets up and lambasts the government for not erecting more hostels for women workers who are wasting the nation's time and strength getting from their jobs to their homes. (If it hadn't been for the usher, who is an oldtimer and is obviously waiting to pounce, I would applaud.) A red-faced Conservative catches someone's eye—not the Speaker's, for as far as I can see he isn't present—and endeavors to put the honorable lady member in her place and gets nowhere with her. Every once in a while a member steps from his seat, ducks to the Speaker's chair and vanishes.

After a while I vanish too and send a message by a burly policeman to my hostess, Dr. Somerskill, M.P. Whilst I wait for her in the lobby I watch constituents buttonholing their members and members buttonholing each other. Some of them are in uniform and wear decorations. In general I get the feeling of a well-run club to which only men and women with certain qualifications are eligible. What are those qualifica-

tions? I can't tell. For on sight the men and women are of all sorts and conditions.

Dr. Somerskill is a pretty dynamic young woman, a member of the Labour Party. She and a woman friend from the Ministry of Supplies feed me sausage and mash which is the gastronomic highlight in the Members' dining room, and, as Dr. Somerskill remarks, discourages unwanted guests. (I remember Jack Hulbert's jest to the effect that the British had now two kinds of bread—bread and sausage.) A male member joins us for a moment and the three talk technically and mysteriously. When he has gone Dr. Somerskill turns to me.

"We've been tracking down an official whom we suspected of dabbling indirectly in the Black Market," she says. "We've got him now." She looks at me very straightly. "Whether you believe it or not," she says, "we won't tolerate dishonesty in our public men."

I remember the Australian at Rowntrees, and I reconsider the men and women I had been watching in the lobbies. So that's the Club's qualification for membership. You may be a fool—the Club tolerates fools all too gladly—but you mustn't be venal. You have to be a fool within the Law. Or you're out.

Interesting, if true. I rather believe it's true.

Dr. Somerskill's friend, whose name has slipped my crumbling memory, is another dynamo. (These two

women remind me of my first two-fisted Regional Commissioner.) They are fiercely alive and on the job. Miss G., in addition to her work in the Ministry of Supplies, for which she has just gleefully snapped up an unsuspected 10,000-pound-load of aluminum, is working for her degree in Economics.

"You see, I'm standing for Parliament myself," she explains.

This is unexpected. So a Member ought, in her estimation, to know something. She isn't just trying to sell herself to her constituents. She is preparing herself to do a job of work, as they say here. Again interesting if true and quite obviously accepted as a truth by both these women.

Dr. Somerskill is pushing through a bill which will make women eligible in the Home Guard. She wants them armed and able to shoot. She has already organized a group of two hundred who, whether the government approves or not, will fight as the Russian women are doing—if and when the Germans ever land, except as prisoners, in England. I feel more and more satisfied that the windows I broke in my militant suffrage days were not broken in vain.

Dr. Somerskill shows me where the House of Commons once stood. She hopes it will be left as it is as a constant reminder of what happens when a people

elects fools as representatives and when honest men with brains cease to use them.

This afternoon I'm at a boys' school that was evacuated in toto from London. Before the war the pleasant, well-arranged group of wooden buildings was used as an adult holiday camp. The present manager hopes that after the war it will be rebuilt solidly as a permanent school. The boys belong to the lower middle class which is the most anemic and hopeless of all classes here. It clings to a depressed, villa-minded respectability and has none of that lustiness and incorrigible joy of life that keeps the Cockney head above water in the worst storms.

The gardens are prettily laid out and there is a fine playing field where cricket and football teams that are rapidly acquiring an old-school-tie spirit take on rival teams within calling distance. The boys are a wholesome-looking crowd and the disgruntled parents are now reconciled to the point of making their offspring an excuse for a day or two in the country. The manager is an old soldier. Sometimes the Army, by way of a change, throws up an idealist and a dreamer. This eager, rather battered-looking man dreams of what might be done with these boys whose general welfare is in his hands. It's an opportunity which makes anyone

who cares about the future breathless. But who cares? Not everyone. Not, by any means, everyone who takes on the job of preparing these youngsters to meet it. Here and there, as in the Skipsy School in Sussex, the veriest little East-End rough-scuff are learning to be good citizens, under the leadership of a born teacher who has been able to inspire his staff. But there are too many men and women, without vocation but with a natural instinct for survival with the least possible struggle, to whom the teaching profession is merely a safe meal ticket. A good salary, a headship in time if you don't think or speak out of turn and finally a pension—all for drilling a little knowledge of this and that into the heads of a few brats for a few hours six days in the week for nine months in the year. So no matter if you loathe the brats and don't care what you do to them or what happens as a result—it's worth it.

My guide is torn between passionate hope and glum despair. Merely raising salaries is of no use. The higher the salary the more the wrong type of man and woman will be tempted to take what looks like the most profitable line of least resistance. The teaching profession demands the highest type of human being. It has, up to now, been the refuge of mediocrities. The born teachers are swamped by them.

But that, I suppose, is what is the matter with our civilization. It's not that there are not enough big jobs

for the big men. There are too many big jobs—there are not enough big men. I think back to that shattered House of Commons. There's a connection between that gaping roof and rubble-strewn floor on which Disraeli once proclaimed an Empire and what I am hearing now. Those ruins are a monument to second-rate men supported by an ill-educated, second-hand-thinking electorate. It's a vicious circle. The second-rate beget the second-rate. Well, we have to break away somewhere. This passionate, frustrated but determined man who talks to me has taken his stand. He will break away or break his heart.



# 14

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I spent this morning in the Defense Area of the East India Docks. "Pop" showed me round. I don't know "Pop's" real name. Nobody uses it anyhow. He's a huge, two-fisted Cockney without an aitch who mothers the sailors waiting in the ship's pool for their next ship. He doles out their pay and unsnarls their domestic and love troubles. He tells their wives when they aren't coming back. He shows me the Chinese Club he has started, and we go over to the sailors' hospital. It's a very modern, cheerful place. You wouldn't think from the matron's gentle, composed manner or from the inmates that they were living—and dying—in the very focal point of danger.

I have the impression—an unconfirmed, unofficial impression—that last year the Germans missed nine-tenths of what they were presumably aiming at. It's no secret that all London's bridges are standing. These docks are working in full force. Only the little houses on either side of the river are gone. Perhaps the people who lived in them were the real German target. If so, they missed that too. Some of the people are dead. None of them were hit where they really lived.

Now I'm in Limehouse. I'm frankly tired. A London County Councillor who is my host has a heart for me. He knows there's only one remedy for tiredness—a good cup of tea. So we go over to the Limehouse Rest Centre. The housekeeper lights a fire in her cosy living room and we have an honest-to-God High Tea with kippers and thick slabs of bread over which butter has been breathed lightly and even a spot of jam.

The Rest Centre's superintendent joins us. The two men make an interesting contrast. They complement each other and play into each other's hands. The superintendent was once a professional mountaineer and has returned in his present job the chivalrous, romantic yet practical quality of his first calling. The Councillor is the bureaucrat of a new school. That's one thing that's come clear to me—the change in officialdom. It's been blasted out of its shell. It's become compassionate

and human. I've recognized in the men and women who risked their lives daily in the areas of devastation a sort of flaming charity that has burned up red tape and melted cast-iron ways of thought. It's in their eyes. It's mixed up with a quiet yet exalted happiness. I've never seen happiness like that before.

I don't know how Londoners were prepared for the first Blitz—I should guess very badly. But I know they're prepared *now*. They've prepared themselves. They've organized themselves. If nothing else justifies democracy the British Civil Defense justifies it. The Rest and Defense Centres are civic jobs, run by the people under local authority. Every borough is a self-contained, self-administered fortress. The Defense Centres—several of them in case one gets knocked out—are manned day and night by citizens who sit beside their telephones waiting for a call from the Wardens in their outlying posts. A huge map dotted with flags and a wooden chart hang on the walls. When an "incident" is reported, a flag is moved to the appropriate area. The ambulances, the heavy and light demolition squads, the fire engines that have been sent out or who have returned are noted on the chart. Only under great stress does one borough call to another borough for help.

To the Rest Centres go the homeless and the desti-

tute. Everything is organized to help them quickly with the least possible strain. They are not questioned. They tell their stories. They aren't sent from pillar to post. The whole organization is under one roof—in one huge room. The victims of an incident move from one desk to another. Do they need money? Do they want to be evacuated? Do they want to store what is left of their possessions? The whole business takes on an average twenty minutes. Whilst the people are waiting for their needs to be supplied, the Rest Centre is their home.

I've been over several of these places, and Limehouse is typical. The Mountaineer discovered that he was also an artist and he has painted bright frescoes on the high white walls. The nursery is well stocked with rocking horses and dolls that have an air of rather annoyed waiting for someone to come along and play with them. The beds in the dormitories are spread with gay patchwork quilts from America. When these people speak of America it is with an emotion that is not normal to them. Statesmen may wrangle and soldiers and sailors give each other bloody noses. But the British people will never forget what America has done for them—not in the way of munitions, for, after all, Great Britain has been largely self-supporting and has sent out much more than she has ever received

—but in the kindness and unstinted charity that expressed itself in clothes and food that kept this desperately afflicted people from despair.

“Please tell Americans,” has been said to me over and over again—and sometimes there have been tears in a man’s eyes—“how we feel about them—how grateful we are. We can’t tell them. But you tell them. We’ll never forget. . . .”

It’s been good hearing.

Here in Limehouse they’re bracing themselves for the next assault. They’ve reconditioned bombed or evacuated houses so they’ll be ready—if they survive—for the next refugees. They’ve hung pictures on the walls. A seventy-year-old Limehouse carpenter in an abandoned warehouse is rebuilding blitzed furniture. (“That old table lost its legs,” he tells me with an ancient chuckle. “But it’s convalescent. It’s coming along nicely.”) They’ve gathered together a collection of china ornaments and knickknacks. It’s admitted they’re pretty awful, but they do make things more homelike.

“You see,” the County Councillor says, “it’s losing their ornaments—their bits of china—the cup they brought back from that Bank Holiday at Margate—that hits them hardest.”

I’ve seen one of those houses. An old lady who had been bombed out twice is sharing it with three other

old ladies. No—they didn't want to go into the country. They wanted to stand by Limehouse.

"They're proud of it," my guide said. (He was a Limehouse man himself and had been given the George Medal for digging out a lot of people in a bombed shelter.)

Well, it would never have occurred to me that you could be proud of Limehouse. But those old ladies are right—I discuss with them the R.A.F.'s big raid on Cologne.

"Those poor Germans," one of the old ladies says, shaking her head.

Over our kippers the County Councillor and the Mountaineer discuss the vexed question of cats, dogs, canaries and even white mice. It seems that in the worst of the Blitz the people wouldn't come to the Centres without their pets.

"And I don't blame them," the Councillor says.

So the authorities erected rows and rows of neat, homelike cages with clean straw and china feeding saucers. I asked why some of the cages had been set at a higher level than the rest.

"We noticed," the Councillor explains demurely, "that cats do not like to sleep on the ground floor."

Certainly something terrific has happened to the official mind.

I look my last on Limehouse—over acres and acres of silent ruin. I remember that no one wants to hear about all this. I have been told that people have heard enough. But they can't hear enough and it's stupid not to try to make them hear more. Because on this testimony to an almost superhuman courage, patience and endurance rests all our hope. On this rock the onslaught first shattered itself. This is the foundation on which the factories are built. The soldiers on the desert count on it. And no one who has not with his own eyes seen what I am seeing can realize or evaluate it.

On my way back from a side-trip to Brighton where I've been seeing the men and women of the Fire-Fighting School at work, I stop off for a night with Susan Ertz in her Sussex home. Brighton is a Defense Area now. Its esplanades have been swept clear of its once cheerful more or less reputable week-enders. Its piers are blasted. Barbed-wire entanglements and gun-emplacements keep guard over the gray sea. Rodean, my old school's hated rival, is now incongruously manned by the Navy. The huge modern hotel on the cliff houses the future fire-fighters who are learning to "cope" with the next onslaught.

Brighton's a haunted place these days. Regency ghosts stalk the deserted seaport, a rude wind ruffling

their jabots and silken coattails. In the drear silence one almost hears the tap of painted heels and the click of jeweled canes. The rough rollicking latter-day crowds drowned these sounds and elbowed the shadowy elegants from the pavements. Now they seem to have re-emerged. But they are sad ghosts. They've left me with a chill in the heart.

Susan and Susan's Sussex home is what I need to warm me. The name, Pook's Farm, has a rich earthy sound to it. It has its roots, like the farm itself, somewhere in the Middle Ages. Also it is eight miles from anywhere and it has taken a lot of good staff-work to get me here. At sight of the red-brick half-timbered walls and the ancient well-being of the shadowy, lavender-scented rooms I make up my mind that somehow I must end my days somewhere like this. It's the old nostalgic sense of "belonging" that, since I don't "belong" by blood or tradition, has always puzzled me. But it's real and insistent. Wherever else I am and however happy, I shall be always an exile. . . .

I unpack my offerings—my bit of butter, my rashers of bacon, my spot of tea. I feel a very shame-faced benefactor. But Susan seems to think it wonderful that I should have remembered. Susan is a genuine half-and-half Anglo-American. I've decided that this



mixture produces the highest form of life. Unlike most racial mixtures it preserves the best of both worlds and discards the worst. Susan has American warmth and English depth. Her voice is soft and deep-toned. What it says has American liveliness. We stroll together over the fields to where a Canadian outfit has been moiling and toiling and probably mouldering for the last year. The men are pretty restive and no wonder. They want action. But I can't help wondering how they will feel about it when they get it. This isn't an aspersion on their courage and devotion. But they come from relative ease and safety. It must be hard for them and for their people to accept wholesale holocausts as inevitable. And there must be holocausts. The people of these islands are differently conditioned. Security and peace have long since gone from among them. The youngest baby is in the line of destruction. Holocausts have become part of the scheme of things. Over there where these men come from there seems to be a choice. Here there is no choice. It's a matter of life and death—of death anyhow.

Susan and I occupy neighboring bedrooms. I'm lying half-asleep, looking up through the shadows thrown by my oil lamp among the heavy ancient rafters. Insidiously the sinister drone of engines weaves itself into my drowsy thoughts and Susan's soft voice,

low-pitched and quiet, so that I, who am not used to all this, shall not be alarmed, draws me back into full, tense wakefulness.

“Better put your light out, my dear. They’re dropping flares. They’re looking for something. . . .”

I put my light out. The drone fades in the distance. My heart takes up its quiet beat. Whatever they are looking for, please God they don’t find it, tonight or ever.

I get back to London in time to meet a smart, good-looking flight officer in the W.A.A.F.’s. She’s the mother of two children who were evacuated to America and who are with friends of mine in New York. They have sent all sorts of messages and she, of course, wants to know everything I can tell her. And yet it’s a stilted, painful conversation. She explains how difficult it is to write. She’s terribly hard-worked. And besides, what is there to say that they will understand? Their father is in Libya. She doesn’t want to tell them that a month has passed since last she heard from him—or what that may mean. And their letters to her deal with a life equally remote. Suddenly I catch sight of the whole perplexing tragedy. She who tried to save her children has lost them. And they have lost her and their country. They can never really come back. If they try to they will find themselves excluded, by

reason of default, from this communion. They are the helpless little *embusqués* of this war who have been preserved from terror and privation but also robbed of an experience that would have entitled them to share in England's future. If they are happy with their foster-parents, the more painful their return to parents who have become shadows to them. And some of them, I know, are not happy. I know one child, barely eight years old, who is already hag-ridden by a guilt complex. She feels that she has run out on her mother and father and schoolmates. She hates with a morose hatred the country and the people who have given her a detested sanctuary.

It doesn't help me now, in this difficult encounter, to realize that for once I've been right. From the first I had no sympathy for the evacuation even of young children to America. It seemed to me worse than a mistake. It was a betrayal of this country's principles. It was like hoarding—an effort to secure an unfair advantage for the privileged. The tardy addition of a handful of the underprivileged was only a guilty acknowledgement of the fact. One can understand how it happened and above all one is grateful to those warm-hearted Americans who took strange children and some even stranger mothers into their homes. (Some of the mothers who accompanied their children into exile, have from all accounts, done their bit to

make their country a bye-word for bad manners, selfishness and ingratitude.) One can sympathize with distracted parents who, haunted by the horrors that they already witnessed on their thresholds, obeyed their very human instincts. Besides, they had been conditioned to the theory of escapism by twenty years of it. But this is a total war, fought by men and women and children. There is no honest escape for anyone—there should be none. I think most people know this now. But for some of them, like this pretty, sad-faced woman opposite me, the knowledge has come too late.

The unkindest cut of all is that the past majority of the children who stayed behind have not suffered, either mentally or physically. Most of them are healthier than they have ever been and no psychiatrist has so far been able to discover symptoms of these nervous breakdowns that were to result inevitably from the air raids. Only when the mothers panic do the children react badly. And as, by and large, the mothers don't panic, the children have taken Hitler's fire and fury in their stride and even with a war whoop. And why shouldn't they? They're tougher than ill-poised adolescents. If the truth were ever admitted, they're still barbaric enough themselves to get a kick out of barbarism. At least, if they survive, they will have been fitly prepared to deal with the world in which they will have to live. Those who will not survive or only

as maimed and crippled men and women will have their own tragic but significant part in the pattern of the future.

But my companion and I say nothing of these ruthless and vain reflections. We exchange platitudes. I tell her that Jimmy and Jean look well and happy and she says how glad she is. When I get back I'll tell Jimmy and Jean how smart their mother looked in her uniform. Probably they'll say nothing at all. They won't really understand about their mother being in uniform. In fact, she's already becoming a little vague to them. The weekly letter home has to be forced out of them by persuasion and duress.

And that's not the end to a sad story.

What I have been trying to find out is not so much what these people are doing but what they are thinking and even more what they are feeling. Everything I have seen and done—from day-nurseries to bomber-commanders and supping at the Savoy with a young Guardsman—has been a means to that end.

It isn't easy to catch an Englishman thinking. One glimpse of the hook and he's off into the protecting shadow of his river's rocks and weeds. He will, if hard pressed, try to throw you off his track by a swirl of words. Or he will take on a protective color-

tion and lie inert in the shadows. If necessary he will lie like a trooper.

It's not deceitfulness. It's partly shamefacedness concerning his thoughts but even more a distrust of the whole thinking process. That's not the mainspring of his actions. If you want to find what it is you've got to be patient and lie low yourself.

Besides, these people are very tired. They can't afford to look ahead or even around them. They've got to keep their minds on the immediate job and not weaken themselves with worry and conjecture about tomorrow. They're like parachutists. They carefully don't imagine what would happen if the rip-cord doesn't rip. They relax their mental and physical muscles against the final impact.

But deep in their subconscious is a purpose and after a while you feel its drive. They're going somewhere. This war is a series of painful steps in the direction of a new country—the New Jerusalem of which Blake sang. They may never reach it. But that's where they're headed.

In their political progress they are moving steadily to the Left—all of them. The Conservative of today is the Liberal of yesterday. The extreme Left banks up in the neighborhood of Socialism. But the main drift goes no further. The passionate popular enthusiasm

for Russia has nothing to do with a passion for Communism. The British don't like what the Russians did in the past (but then they like even less what they did themselves) but they do like what the Russians are doing now.

The Welsh indeed, according to Rachel, have gone so far as to discover that Timoshenko is of Welsh descent, his ancestors' name being Timothy Jenkins, and have formally notified him of the fact and welcomed him back into the fold. But the general appreciation of what Russia is doing in the present is the greater because of this country's uneasiness concerning its own relative inaction. The clamor for a second front as expressed at a mass meeting of 60,000 Londoners on whose outskirts I clung for a while yesterday is not raised in the stupid belief that a second front can be induced by clamor. It's a testimony to this people's eagerness to fight alongside brave men who—inadvertently no doubt—saved them or at least gave them time to save themselves. But however comradely they may feel toward the Russians they have not become, in spite of the Party's claims and hopes, Comrades. They don't, as a whole, like "isms" of any sort and they regard Communism as a Russian idea for running Russians which is no concern of theirs. (I have a Communist friend who hopefully opens all her dealings with the proletariat by a comradely salute

with the fist. She has never, in my experience, received more than a blank stare of astonishment in reply. The proletariat seemed to think she was a bit cracked, poor soul.) The recent increase in the Party's numbers means very little in a country which shifts its political leanings overnight, as often as not, to express disapproval of the Party in power. And Communism does offer an apparently firm perch for minds that have to have some sort of categorical affirmative to rest on.

But at the moment politics of any sort are in the discard. People are sick of talk, sick of argument, sick even of Churchill's speeches. They want to get on with the bloody war. They mean to win it and their main political activity consists of keeping a weather eye on the Cliveden Set and the men and women of Munich who, draped in the cloak of a reasonable and intelligent patriotism will try, when the opportunity offers, to sabotage the people's victory. At least the people are sure of it. That's why a Vote of Censure in the House, which is as sensitive to the people's temper as a straw to the wind, invariably fizzles out. It's not that the people aren't critical of Churchill and often angry with his government. But they fear that their criticism and anger may be used by their internal enemies as a means to unseat a man, who with all his faults, has never wavered in his loyalty to the common cause.



There's only one thing that would turn the extraordinary revolution that is quietly going on here into a bloody mess—it would be the re-emergence into power of that handful of men and women who, like their prototypes in France, prefer the survival of their class to the survival of their country and who would consequently and if they could, sabotage aid to Russia and bring about a compromise peace with Hitler. One clear glimpse of their Machiavellian hands at work and then indeed heads might begin to roll here too.

The English people are fighting this war without a song in their hearts, without banners, without parades and with practically no appeals to their patriotic instincts. All the time I have been here I have heard no cheering, except for the Russians. No flags fly in the streets. If any orchestra were so ill-advised as to play "Land of Hope and Glory" I've an idea the audience would walk out on it, too hot with discomfort to sit still and endure what would seem to them a horrible spiritual anachronism. They're not fighting for that kind of glory, and they can no longer express themselves in its terms. They're not fighting in the hopes that Elgar probably had in mind. They're not fighting for the British Empire which in its old form has ceased to exist anyhow except in the perfervid imaginations of certain Americans who are still lashing their tails

over the Revolution. No one could induce them to fight for it. (It was their inability to see that they would have to fight for something entirely different that kept them disarmed and stubbornly pacifist during the fatal period from 1933 to the hour of their terrible awakening.) They've had all that. It was a great national experience. But now they're through with it. They're going on to something else. In the Kipling-esque sense they're not even fighting for England. The one patriotic song they ever sang and then, as I understand, only briefly and shyly, as though they were being tricked into a rather cheap display of their most secret and sacred feelings, concerned only the permanence of their beloved countryside and their way of life. If Hitler by his treatment of a distracted and unhappy Europe had proved that he had a real New Order to offer, a new Magna Carta of liberties by which each people could live and think and speak in its own image, the peoples of these islands would have had the fight knocked out of them. It was Germany's one chance of victory. But after all Caesar sized the Germans up long ago. And Hitler is in heart and mind only a frustrated paperhanger.

The English are not fighting for the Monarchy. They like the Monarchy. It's a national symbol, free from politics, and they like symbols. They're fond of the King and Queen, who represent their own un-

spectacular decencies. But they wouldn't fight for the Monarchy either. They wouldn't fight to keep India. India could go her way tomorrow if they could trust her. But they don't trust her. They haven't forgotten that India's favorite spokesman praised France for the courage of her capitulation or that he pontifically advised the British people to lay down their arms and take the blood-soaked enemy to their bosoms. They haven't forgotten that he announced his saintly willingness to open India's gates to the new enemy. And why not? What does freedom and democracy mean to a people whose very religion keeps millions of their own race in hopeless social and moral subjection? Indeed the English suspect that there is a strong resemblance between the Sacred Cow and Hitler and between one kind of ghetto and another. At least they dare take no chances. They're more than willing to admit that India has a case against them and a claim that must be met. But they have a case against her too. They reckon that any nation or individual who in this hour of unexampled peril plays up their past and even their present grievances is a self-confessed traitor to civilization.

And they don't like blackmail.

That's, by and large, what they feel about India. But they wouldn't fight to hold India for its own sake. They don't give a damn for all the wealth of the Indies.

And if anybody even imagined they could be lured into their present sufferings for the sake of individual or national aggrandizement that body would have barked up the wrong tree and been long since out on a limb.

Well, what are these people fighting for?

Last Sunday I went for a stroll in Hyde Park, which looks more countrified than ever without its railings, and came to the Marble Arch. There were the tub-thumpers and their good-humored audiences. An old, rather shabby gentleman proved from Biblical quotations that the English were the Lost Tribe of Israel and that all therefore would be well with them. An esoteric speaker explained the stars and their constellations and their influence on human destiny, and a fierce little fellow demanded Free Trade (of all things at this moment) and denounced tariffs as the root of all evil. A neat gentleman from the Ministry of Information gave out information. A fat, red-faced fellow argued against a second front. The crowd seemed to think he was a Fascist in disguise and when things got too hot he took, figuratively speaking, to earth and came up in another place in the guise of an ardent patriot. The crowd accepted the transformation in sardonic silence. But there was one speaker who held the largest, most attentive crowd.

“Wot we won’t stand for,” he shouted ferociously, “is being pushed abaht—not by nobody. We don’t like anybody being pushed abaht—Poles or Czechs or Jews or whatever. And we won’t ’ave it. You tell that to ’Itler with a couple of bombs. Ask ’im who the ’ell ’e thinks ’e is—pushing and shovin’ his betters. . . .”

He went on to talk more pacifically about the British Commonwealth of Nations and the United States.

“They’ve got to get together and stay together,” he said, “so that little decent peoples can tie up to ’em, so to speak, and be safe and free to look after their own affairs in their own way—not like bullies and tyrants, mind you, pushing people abaht, but like decent, law-abiding policemen. Like ’im over there,” the speaker said, jerking a thumb and a wink at a tall Bobby on the crowd’s outskirts. Whereat the Bobby blushed up into the shadow of his helmet and moved on, and the crowd laughed affectionately.

“Mark my words,” the speaker concluded, “one of these days we won’t ’ave to ’ave even policemen. That will be . . .” He broke off. He was evidently having trouble with a big word. He brought it out at last with a triumphant bang on his rickety pulpit. “. . . the milleni-yum!” he shouted.

And the crowd applauded and laughed as English crowds do when a speaker gets a bit too near the bone.

As I walked on, a dinner party in Princeton flashed

into my memory. I was sitting next Professor Aydelotte, the director of the Institute for Advanced Study, and glooming about the post-war world. He turned to me. "I think you're wrong," he said. "I think humanity will be entering on its Golden Age."

So this American man of learning and this aitchless Englishman had the same thought. This is what their peoples are fighting for—though they might deny it with their last breath—the Golden Age.

As to which of them shall lead the union they must forge if they are to reach their goal, the English people neither know nor care. They'd as lief the United States took over. Their only fear of her is that for a second time she will deny her destiny of greatness. Anyhow the English will be great too—but not in the old way.

I'm spending one of my last evenings with Clough Williams-Ellis, the famous Welsh architect, and his wife. They are a tall, handsome, vital couple, more loose-limbed, mentally and physically, than English people ever can be. They boil with ideas which they aren't afraid to express passionately. They aren't afraid to show that they have faith—that they believe in the people and in their basic integrity. They're not fooled. But they know that to believe in nothing and nobody is the worst sort of credulity.

Ellis shows me some of the plans for the London that is to rise, phoenixlike, out of her ruins. Every architect in Great Britain is seething with plans. There's no repairing the cracked façade this time. The walls are down. The way lies open. Think of it! St. Paul's, standing alone and magnificent, her crowding, dwarfing retinue of mean houses and narrow streets wiped out. What couldn't be done with such a chance? (Wren must be stirring in his grave.) Imagine a square to rival St. Marks—a great avenue leading down from it to Nelson's Column. Shopping streets without traffic, all London's stations gathered with one terminus, landing fields on the roofs of buildings. What generation of dreamers and planners and workers has had a chance like this?

And the social order—a real New Order—a new society—a new relationship between man and man . . . Let the old glories go. Here in this island we'll create again in the fashion of our greatest past—blueprints from which the world can draw a pattern of a new civilization.\*

There is the opportunity. There, too, is the danger. For suppose London falls into the hands of the man who blighted Berkeley Square and brought Nash's gracious street to the level of their own vulgarity?

\* The Beveridge report which may become the new Magna Carta was published just after this was written.

Suppose the vultures who are already speculating in London's bombed-out lands have their way with an exhausted people? Suppose those Vested Interests are too strong for the people's dreams? Suppose the Men of Munich crawl out of their fox-holes to betray the people in a new way?

It's up to the young. It's in their hands. This time they've got to roll up their sleeves. I believe they will. They've none of the illusions that rotted the souls of the last post-war's Bright Young People. They know there'll be no pleasure living in their lifetime. The Golden Age must be built with iron and steel and with their sweat. But never in her history have the children of this island had a chance like this. I want to live long enough to see them take it.



# 15

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It's almost flying time again. Before I came over I fussed about my chances of getting back to my New Jersey farm, my friends, my dogs, my work, my ordered way of life. Now I'm hoping secretly the plane won't go tomorrow. It's a stupid wish. Its fulfilment would only mean a delay. My place isn't here any more. I'm a middle-aged woman never at best of much practical use. I'd be another burden. But I don't want to go. I remember an American film called, I think, *Eagle Squadron* in which an American aviator serving alongside the R.A.F. says to another American boy, "What would you give to see the bright lights of Los

Angeles?" And the other boy (who is to die the morrow) retorts, "Not a nickle. And nor would you."

For once Hollywood stumbled on an authentic line. No one worth his salt who comes into the heart of this terrific business wants to get out of it.

I've many regrets. There's so much I haven't seen—so many pilgrimages I haven't made. I'd planned to go to Scotland—even as far as Orbst in Skye where I have spent enchanted days and to a little place in South Wales where Rachel, who is Welsh, once had a cottage overlooking Milford Haven. (It's been bombed since then.) But time and my strength gave out. Perhaps, after all, there's a good side to my failure. I've seen England and the English and that was my main object. England isn't Great Britain. Indeed there's an old joke that she doesn't even govern herself—that it's really the Scotch and the Welsh who run this island. That may be true. But if things go wrong it's always the English who get mentioned in the dispatches. Not even the Germans have maintained that the Scotch and the Welsh are decadent. It's the English who have been consigned over and over again to the tomb, sometimes with floral tributes, but usually without. In battle it's the Dominion troops who save the day. Indeed, an intelligent American once said to me, as an accepted matter of fact, that the English were never any good as soldiers. Shades of Crecy, of Agincourt, of Blen-

heim and Malplaquet! Shades of another Churchill, of Allenby, of Lawrence! (I won't mention the Peninsular Campaign or the trifling incident at Waterloo, because by that time the Scotch and Welsh and Irish were responsible and Blücher, arriving some hours late, won Waterloo anyhow.) And there's another equally inexplicable judgment. The English, who first conceived our modern ideas of freedom, who have fought for it down the ages, whose domestic history is the least bloody and tyrannical of any long national history, whose imperialism, justified by the moralities and exigencies of its time, compares very favorably with other imperialisms, are nonetheless docketed by even well-disposed foreigners as feudal tyrants and sycophantic bootlickers and slaves. Moreover, these critics apply to the British—but particularly to the English—standards of conduct that they apply to no other nation, least of all their own, so that every sin of commission and omission becomes unpardonable. I wonder, for instance, what epithets some Americans would have found for the British—but particularly the English—if Great Britain had come to terms with Germany whilst her sworn ally France was still desperately fighting? Perfidious Albion would have been the mildest of them.

There is a grim joke going the rounds in England.

“They only like us when we’re being bombed to death.”

Why is this? Is it *Schadenfreude*? Is it jealousy? Is it annoyance because the English refuse to play corpse at the distinguished obsequies which have been so often prepared for them? Anyway, it’s all too bad. Because never before have they been more ready to cry “Peccavi!”, to make good their sins and failures and to open their hearts to other peoples. They have never been more sure of themselves. But they never have been less arrogant, less insular. Toward Americans particularly their feeling is one of unfeigned gratitude, affection and sympathy. Except for that one much-badgered taxi driver I never heard of anyone who made use of American misfortunes as a *Tu quoque* or even as a weapon of legitimate self-defense. Men, who in this crisis in human relationships, indulge their ancient grievances and prejudices to poison all this good-will seem to me not only enemies to England, but to their own country and all civilized society.

Well, I’ve seen the English for myself and, at any rate, I’m satisfied. I believe now not only in final victory but in the possibility of an early victory. I haven’t seen the Germans of late—though I’ve heard them—but I didn’t live among them for eight years for nothing, and no one can convince me that their morale is

what it was in the last war when it rested securely on a hundred years of commercial prosperity and military triumphs. The morale of the Nazis (the vast majority of the German people) is a fever working on a constitution infected by privation and defeat. The Nazi spectacular edifice is built on rubble. A few lusty blows in the right place and it will come tumbling down so suddenly and completely that we ourselves may be consternated and bewildered.

To deal these blows, however, we need more than strength and courage. We need brains and imagination to direct them. So far the British like all the United Peoples have been singularly unblessed with these commodities. Over and over again the best soldiers in the world have been betrayed by the worst fools. I used the word "betrayed" advisedly, for at a time when the fate of our civilization hangs in the balance, fools and traitors are virtually synonymous. I'm not sure that of the two the fools aren't the more dangerous. The Russians think so. They shoot their fools—with excellent results. Perhaps, if instead of retiring our disastrous brass-heads to the bosoms of their families, consoled with medals and pensions for having sunk a fleet or lost an army, we put them up against a wall as a warning to other fools to quit their jobs before they wreck them, we might do better. But the English, at any rate, won't do that sort of thing. Un-

imaginative as they are supposed to be, they have a poignant understanding of the man who fails. They are hag-ridden, too, by the knowledge that in the final issue they are responsible for him. They put him in power. They permitted a state of things in which he and his ilk flourished and multiplied. So they give him a knighthood and another job.

This may be a sign of healthy soul-searching and magnanimity. It's not a condition for an early victory. But then perhaps an early victory would be another defeat. Perhaps a prolonged war is our only hope of learning in our very bones that if free peoples elect fools and shysters to mislead and hoodwink them they and their children will pay the price in that all too familiar formula of blood and sweat and tears.

The English, like all the free peoples, are paying. This should be said for them: that they are paying without stint, without complaint, without trying to unload the blame on other shoulders. I'm glad to have seen them with my own eyes.

Necessarily I've only seen as far as my vision permits and no deeper than myself. And even that much requires a big writer with many words to do it justice. And I am only a little writer with few words. But I've been honest within my limitations and this much I know for certain—that I have seen the shaping of great events by a great people if only because I myself am

so greatly changed. For the last few years I have been disturbed, disintegrated and afraid. I go back with a quiet heart. I am composed and integrated. I think I shall never be afraid again.

This is what the much be-written, berated but still mysterious English have done to me. This is my tribute to them.

Rachel and I are dining together (for the last time for how long?) at a little restaurant off Oxford Street. It's our favorite. For five shillings you get an honest meal with no frills, but with a wholesome, friendly atmosphere. Simple people frequent it. Some American soldiers have found it out. I look at Rachel's grave face across the table. And I think of the winter, waiting like a lean, hungry wolf just beyond this lovely summer time.

We try to console each other. It's been wonderful. When I get back to the States we won't feel so utterly separated. Best of all, when the war is over, we won't meet as strangers. I remember something Muriel said to me. "If you hadn't come back we should have lost you."

Well—of my own free will I have come back. That, one day, will count in my favor. It'll give me a claim to a share in this brotherhood.

Rachel and I saunter down Bond Street, across Piccadilly, down St. James Street. Everything is very peaceful in the benign twilight. What yet must happen to these austere and noble streets?

The beauty of London is a sword in the heart.

I'm over the Atlantic. Below me is a floor of thick white cloud. In a cold sky the full moon rises to the east. To the west the sun is sinking. In the loneliness and silence of this catastrophic world the tumult of our passing seems to deaden—to become impotent. I remember that once that pale-faced globe was part of our globe and that it was torn living from our surface. It hangs, like a ghost, on our track, haunting us with our own mortality. And one day, according to the wise men, that sun will blaze up for the last time and our universe will pass into darkness and eternal silence.

Then why all this sound and fury? Why do we struggle? Why do these people whom I have left behind give their little hour for something less than nothing—an illusion, a fantasy? Why do they offer up their meaningless lives for the nobility of the human soul, if no soul exists, or, if it exists, no immortality awaits it?

We know no answer. There may be no answer. Or



there may be one. And one day we may come before it.

As an English official—of all people—said to me before I flew to England, “One must have faith.”









